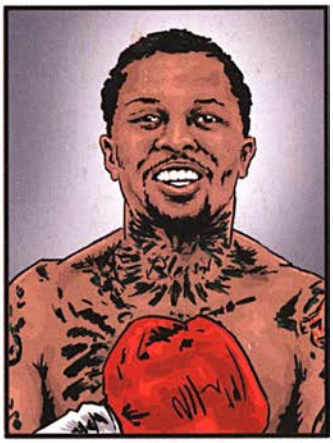
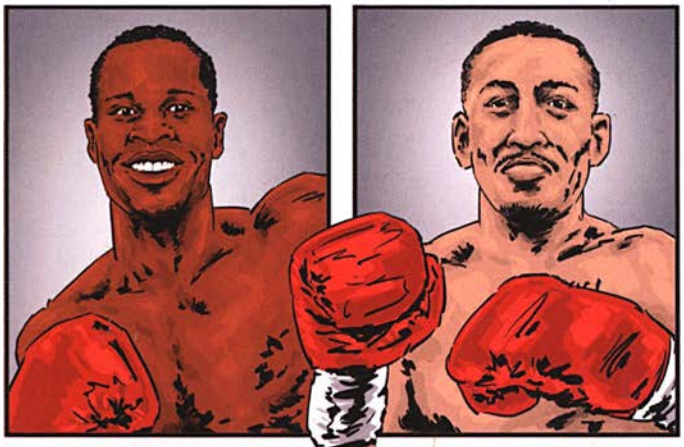
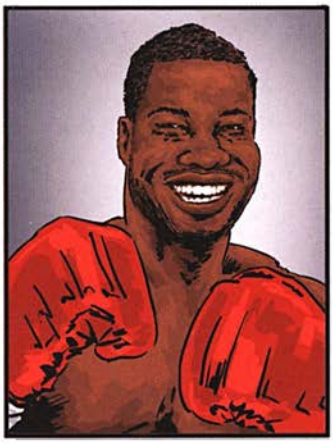
MAYWEATHER: FIGHTER OF THE DECADE

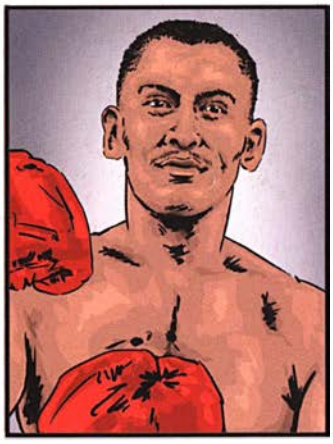
THE BIBLE OF BOXING

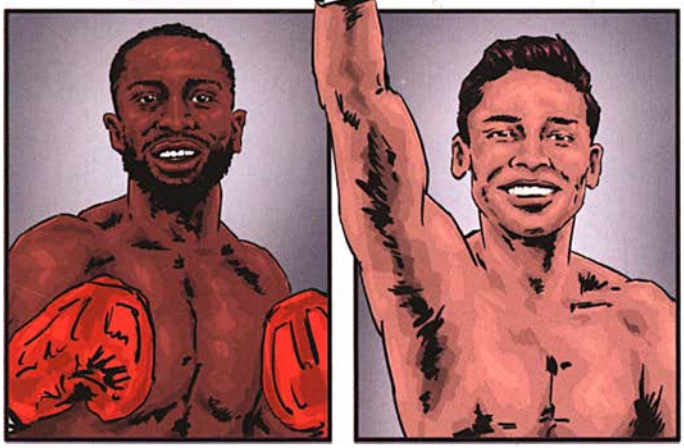
The RING









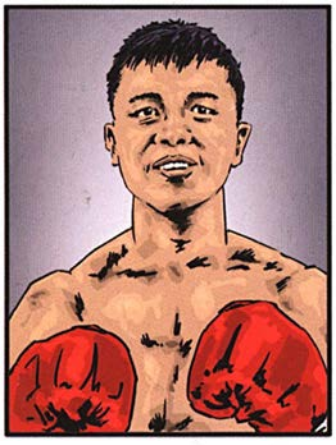


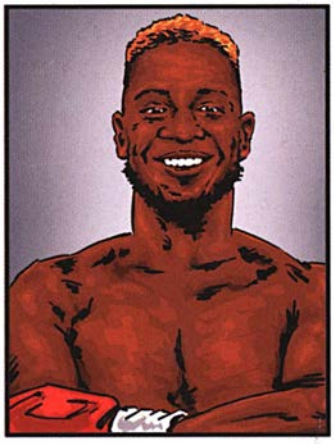
2019 UP-AND-COMER YEARBOOK

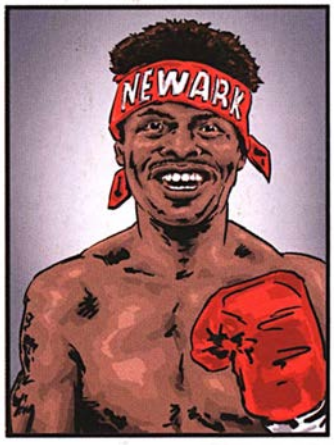
THE FUTURE OF BOXING

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN 2020

Top-Bottom, L-R:
Gervonta 'Tank' Davis
Devin Haney
Teofimo Lopez
Daniel Dubois
Vergil Ortiz
Jaron Ennis
Ryan Garcia
Xu Can
Chris Colbert
Shakur Stevenson







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Past and future rivals? Ryan Garcia and Devin Haney, who split bouts in the amateurs, were friendly in the dressing room at Garcia's brief fight against Romero Duno in November, but the rising lightweight stars could meet again in the ring soon.

26 HONOR ROLL
TEN BUDDING YOUNG STARS ARE EVALUATED BY THE RING'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
By Doug Fischer

34 MONEY SPLIT
FLOYD MAYWEATHER'S 'FIGHTER OF THE DECADE' LABEL HAS REIGNITED SOME OLD FEUDS
By Tom Gray

42 THE STANDARD-BEARER
SHOWTIME BOSS STEPHEN ESPINOZA SURVEYS THE STATE OF TELEVISED BOXING
By Joseph Santoliquito

46 GREATEST HITS: RUBEN OLIVARES
THE FORMER BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMP RELIVES SIX OF HIS VICTORIES
By Anson Wainwright

50 'TANK' ROLLS ON
GERVONTA DAVIS COULD BE THE NEXT PAY-PER-VIEW STAR
By Michael Montero

56 (STILL) THE NEXT BIG THING
TEOFIMO LOPEZ REJUSTIFIES THE HYPE
By Ryan Songalia

60 THIS 'BOOTS' WAS MADE FOR WINNING
JARON ENNIS IS CRUISING ON TALENT, HARD WORK AND FAMILY WISDOM
By Joseph Santoliquito

64 DOWN BUT NEVER OUT
MIGUEL BERCHELT REBOUNDED WITH A VENGEANCE
By Anson Wainwright

68 ALL IN GOOD TIME
AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE, ADELAIDA RUIZ IS BACK IN THE WORLD TITLE HUNT
By Thomas Gerbasi

DEPARTMENTS

2 OPENING SHOT
4 COME OUT WRITING
7 RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer
10 FIGHTER OF THE MONTH
11 NEW FACES By Anson Wainwright
12 JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES By Thomas Hauser
14 THE FACE OF BOXING By Wojtek Urbanek & Thomas Hauser
16 RING RATINGS PACKAGE
70 WORLD BEAT
76 AT THE FIGHTS
78 FROM THE ARCHIVES
80 COMING UP

SUBSCRIBER COVER ART BY KRONK AAART; NEWSSTAND COVER PHOTO BY CHRIS TROTMAN

Julian Williams stunned Jarrett Hurd to take a pair of junior middleweight titles back in May, but "J-Rock" found himself on the opposite side of the upset equation against Jeison Rosario on January 18. The young Dominican flew in under the radar and ripped Williams' belts away with a shocking fifth-round stoppage in Philadelphia.

PHOTO BY COREY PERRINE

WORTHY TRADITION

It used to be common for past and present greats to show up at major fights and be introduced in the ring prior to the fight itself. Often, seeing some of these greats parade around in the ring smiling and shaking hands was as exciting as the fight itself. I recently watched the 1955 heavyweight championship bout between Rocky Marciano and Archie Moore. Both fighters were in the ring but were in the process of putting their gloves on. So, while that was taking place, the announcer started introducing some of the champions in attendance and asked them to come up into the ring. Not only did fans get to see Marciano and Moore, but also Max Baer, Lou Ambers, Nino Valdes, Mickey Walker, Sandy Saddler, Tony DeMarco, Jimmy Braddock, Sugar Ray Robinson, Bob Satterfield, Joe Louis and Jack Dempsey. Wow!

Steve Hall
Jenison, Mich.

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: What an amazing cast of characters, and what a privilege to see them all together. In the same spirit, here's a photo from our archives that captured another distinguished group in 1994, not from before a fight, but at the event called "Fight Night '94." From left to right are Beau Jack, Sandy Saddler, Carmen Basilio, Kid Gavilan, Ingemar Johansson, Gene Fullmer, Bob Foster, Ken Norton, George Chuvalo, Joe Frazier, Archie Moore, Jake LaMotta and Floyd Patterson.

ROUGAROU REMATCH!

I enjoyed your account of the WBSS series ("World Boxing Super Surreal," February 2020), though I would have liked more on the utterly splendid Regis Prograis-Josh Taylor fight. My scoring had it either a firm 115-113 or a "generous" 116-112 in Prograis' favor, but since the latter did not protest and everyone seemed happy, I concluded that my bias toward "Rougarou" clouded my judgment.

On a lark, I went to the punch statistics on the internet (BoxStat.co). Prograis outlanded Taylor 252-207. Unsurprisingly, he landed more punches per minute, on average. In terms of the usual division of punches, Prograis outlanded Taylor 117-80 in jabs and 135-127 in power punches.

Is this among the worst decisions ever? No, though I strongly disagree with it. The fight was very well contested, and it is hardly surprising when crowd noise affects the judges. Should Prograis be given a rematch on "our side of The Pond"? Absolutely! His performance and his class make him most deserving.

Bernie Freydberg
Gulfport, Fla.

TERENCE WHO?

Terence Crawford's recent social media onslaught did nothing but convince real boxing fans that this onetime candidate for P4P honors has dropped, not only from that lofty list, but also from the elite in his own division

Terence Crawford continues to notch victories while his career continues to frustrate our readers.

[Editor's note: Crawford still sits at No. 4 on The Ring's pound-for-pound list and No. 2 at welterweight]. His schedule in 2019 had him socking Amir Khan sufficiently below the belt as to make the Englishman quit, followed by a regrettable performance against the almost unpronounceable Egidijus Kavaliauskas, a fighter who hadn't won a bout since November of 2018 but still managed to put Terence down (despite the referee's miscue). Now "Bud" is calling out a guy who is still recovering from being thrown from a speeding Ferrari (Errol Spence) and made it clear he has no interest in squaring off against a two-time champ (Shawn Porter) who, unfortunately for Terence, it appears has been wearing his seat belt and is prepared to "belt" him all over the ring. Crawford recently re-signed with Top Rank, the one promotional agency that guarantees him isolation from quality fights in 2020. What does that say about his intentions?

The good people of Omaha really had something special back in the day – and filled the home arenas to support him. What a shame that all seems so long ago.

Richie Pugliese
Palm Desert, Calif.

TERENCE HOW?

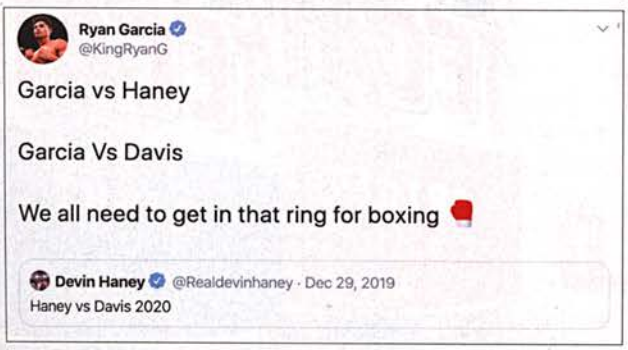
Looking at your February issue and wondering how Terence Crawford could be ahead of Errol Spence in the pound-for-pound rankings but Bud is lower in the welterweight rankings?

Steve Brown
Bowie, Md.

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: This exact situation was addressed in the December 2019 edition of "Come Out Writing," so you can get a full explanation there. Here's the short version: Crawford has been on the P4P list since May 2015 when he was a junior welterweight titleholder and had already been the Ring champion at lightweight. Spence didn't get on the list until September 2017, not long after he won the IBF welterweight title – his first. At that point, Crawford hadn't even fought at 147, whereas Spence was already the No. 2 welterweight, just below Keith Thurman. Crawford has the credentials to be higher on the P4P list and has been climbing it longer, but his accomplishments at 147 don't yet exceed those of Spence.

CORRECTION: The vintage-style illustration of Canelo Alvarez printed on the contents page of the March 2020 issue was also featured on the cover of a version sent to subscribers. In that edition, the image was mistakenly attributed to Richard Slone. The artist is Ian Hughes.

TWEET OF THE MONTH



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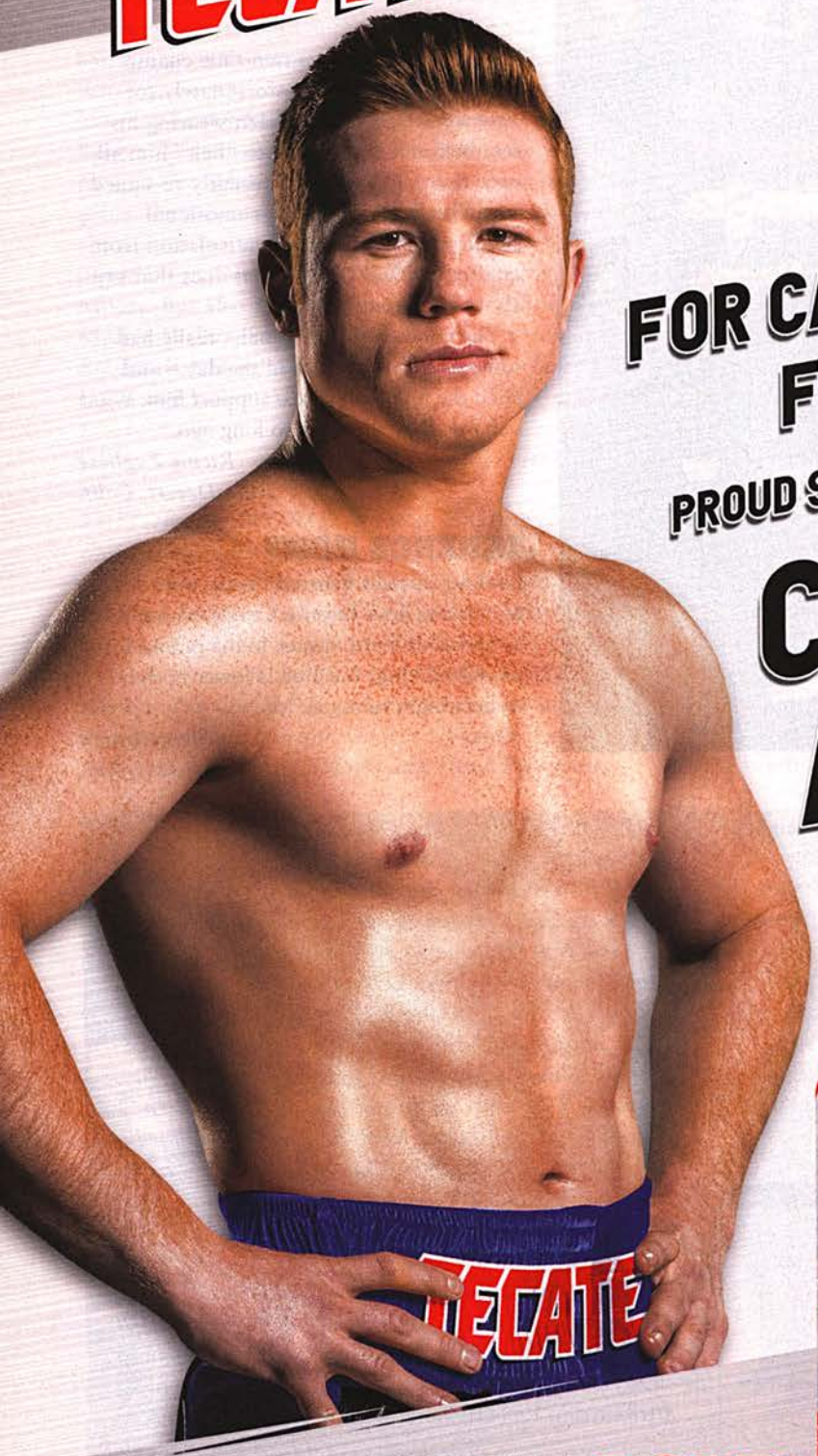

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LOSSES TO BE PROUD OF

A perfect record is one of Floyd Mayweather's many achievements, but defeat can also reveal greatness.

Congratulations to Floyd

Mayweather Jr., who won the Boxing Writers Association of America's Joe Louis Fighter of the Decade award.

Mayweather isn't one of my favorite boxers, but despite only competing against legitimate opponents during the first half the decade, the semi-retired superstar is worthy of the honor that voting members of the BWAA bestowed upon him.

After all, he outpointed two of the top candidates on the BWAA's Fighter of the Decade ballot, Canelo Alvarez and archrival Manny Pacquiao. Had the 23-year-old version of Alvarez defeated Mayweather in 2013, the Mexican star would have been the slam-dunk choice for the FOTD award.

I wonder if Pacquiao, the BWAA's choice for the previous decade, could've won back-to-back FOTD awards if he'd defeated Mayweather in their revenue record-breaking PPV clash in 2015? My hunch is that the Filipino icon's controversial decision losses to Tim Bradley and Jeff Horn, and the spectacular knockout he suffered to nemesis Juan Manuel Marquez in their classic fourth fight, still would have counted against him in the minds of the BWAA voters.

Why do I think that? Because Gennadiy Golovkin and Roman Gonzalez (my personal FOTD choice) didn't make it on the BWAA ballot. I'm not saying that Andre Ward and Wladimir Klitschko, both listed as candidates, didn't deserve consideration. But I do believe that Golovkin, the dominant middleweight champ of the decade, would have been on the ballot had he received the victory he deserved in the first bout with Alvarez and had gotten the nod in the closely contested rematch.

I believe had Gonzalez been awarded the decision most observers thought he deserved after his 12-round war with Srisaket Sor Rungvisai in March 2017, there would have been no need for the immediate rematch, which resulted in his being brutally knocked out six months later. And had he ended the decade with the mystique of an undefeated record to go along with his track record over four weight classes, there's a good chance – I'm not saying it's guaranteed, because he's a little guy, and sub-bantamweights are generally ignored by American boxing writers – he would have been on the BWAA's FOTD ballot.

Ward, who finished his brilliant career with a 32-0 record, got the

benefit of the doubt in a razor-thin decision against Sergey Kovalev and was the dark horse in the FOTD race (Chris Mannix selected the former super middleweight and light heavyweight champ as Sports Illustrated's FOTD).

As dominant as Klitschko was during the decade, the former heavyweight champ didn't have a shot at getting the award, due to a decision loss to Tyson Fury and an 11th-round stoppage to Anthony Joshua.

I don't get this line of thinking. Fury has proven to be more than a one-hit wonder. Klitschko's thrilling, torch-passing battle with Joshua was the Ring and BWAA 2017 Fight of the Year. It was a monster event that rejuvenated the heavyweight division and ignited the sport. And Klitschko was very close to winning it! Why should that valiant performance be held against him?

Same deal with Golovkin's draw and loss to Alvarez and Gonzalez's losses to Sor Rungvisai, who, like Fury, proved to be an elite fighter. Canelo-GGG 1 and 2 were huge events that were good for the sport. The rematch was The Ring's 2018 Fight of the Year. Gonzalez-Sor Rungvisai I was a Fight of the Year candidate, and the Nicaraguan's effort – getting up from an early knockdown, battling through the blood from a bad cut and clawing his way back into the slugfest – was inspirational.

I can say the same things about Pacquiao's KO loss to Marquez. Their classic fourth confrontation produced The Ring's 2012 Fight of the Year, Knockout of the Year and Round of the Year.

Unpopular opinion (but it shouldn't be, and I don't think it used to be): If a fighter loses to a top-tier opponent but gives a courageous effort in a great fight or a masterful performance in a controversial outcome, it shouldn't be viewed as a "setback" or blemish on his or her record.

I think the way Klitschko went out against Joshua enhances his legacy. I feel the same way about Nonito Donaire's bold stand against Naoya Inoue last November. Those losses

Kings collided when former BWAA Fighter of the Decade Manny Pacquiao faced his eventual successor, Mayweather, in 2015.

are among the best performances of the two future first-ballot Hall of Famers' careers.

Just for the hell of it, here are my favorite examples of "winning in defeat," by decade, that have occurred in my lifetime (with the fighter who lost or was held to a controversial draw listed first):

1970s – Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier (I), Frazier vs. Ali (III), Ken Norton vs. Ali (III) and Larry Holmes.

1980s – Sugar Ray Leonard vs. Roberto Duran, Thomas Hearns vs. Leonard (I and II), Alexis Arguello vs. Aaron Pryor (I and II), Duran vs. Marvin Hagler, Tim Witherspoon vs. Holmes, Hearns vs. Hagler and Leonard (II), Hagler vs. Leonard.

1990s – Meldrick Taylor vs. Julio Cesar Chavez (I), George Foreman vs. Evander Holyfield, Holyfield vs. Riddick Bowe (I), Pernell Whitaker vs. Chavez and Oscar De La Hoya, Lennox Lewis vs. Holyfield (I), Ike Quartey vs. De La Hoya, De La Hoya vs. Trinidad.

2000s – Marco Antoino Barrera vs. Erik Morales (I) and Juan Manuel Marquez, De La Hoya vs. Mosley (I and II), Morales vs. Barrera (II and III), Marquez vs. Pacquiao (I and II), Pacquiao vs. Morales (I), Bernard Hopkins vs. Jermain Taylor (I), Winky Wright vs. Taylor, Sergio Martinez vs. Kermit Cintron and Paul Williams (I).

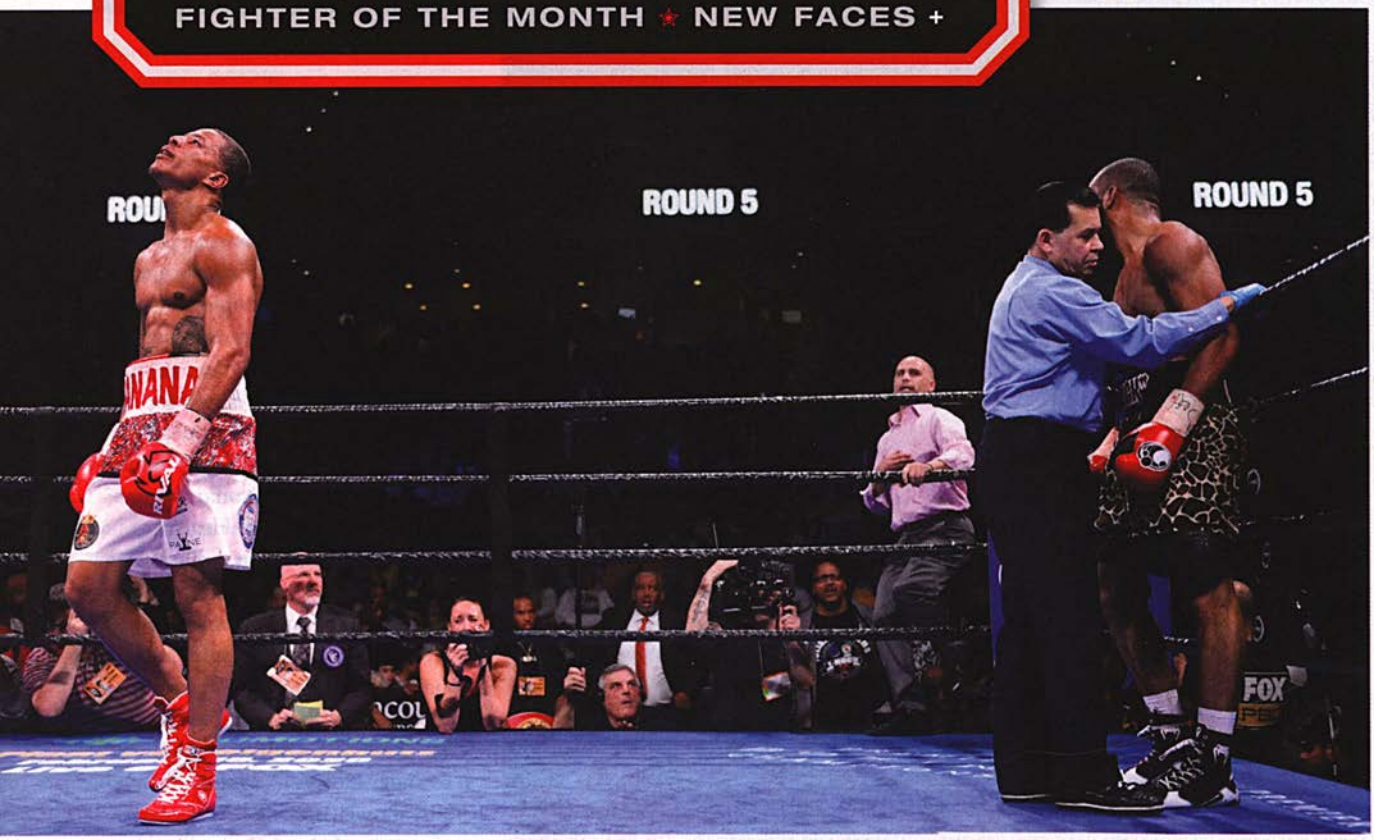
2010s – Pacquiao vs. Marquez (IV), Pacquiao vs. Bradley (I), Kovalev vs. Ward (I), Klitschko vs. Joshua, Gonzalez vs. Sor Rungvisai (I), Golovkin vs. Alvarez (I and II), Regis Prograis vs. Josh Taylor, Sergiy Derevyanchenko vs. Golovkin, Donaire vs. Inoue.

Half of the fighters on the "wrong end" of the losses and draws I mentioned were FOTD candidates. Could you imagine leaving the likes of Ali, Leonard and Holyfield off any ballot?

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES +

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH



JEISON ROSARIO

There was an air of disbelief around everyone involved in Jeison Rosario's upset victory over Julian Williams, including Rosario himself.

Upsets are contagious, it would seem. Last May, Julian "J-Rock" Williams put forward a strong case for Upset of the Year honors when he dropped and outpointed Jarrett Hurd to claim the IBF and WBA junior middleweight titles in Fairfax, Virginia. The tidy Philadelphia technician boxed a brilliant fight against an elite operator and kicked open the door to the big time. However, a direct rematch with Hurd, which would have crowned a new Ring Magazine 154-pound champion, failed to materialize and Williams needed a new assignment. Enter Miami-based Dominican Jeison Rosario. The 24-year-old had a respectable 19-1-1 (13 knockouts) record, but he was lacking in experience, and a sixth-round stoppage loss to Nathaniel Gallimore in April 2017 suggested that he was out of his depth. This promised to be a routine, nicely-packaged homecoming for Williams, who faced the undistinguished Rosario at the Liacouras Center, located within the City of Brotherly Love. While things were going well enough early, it was clear that the challenger was in Philly for a fight, and there were one or two danger signs for Williams, who sustained a nasty cut to his left eyelid in Round 2.. The big breakthrough came in Round 5, when Rosario nailed his man mid-exchange with a solid left hook that robbed Williams of his equilibrium. Rosario seized his moment, following up with a vicious array of power shots to the head and body. Williams didn't have a leg under him, so counterpunches were out of the question at that point. All he could do was attempt to hold on, but his legs finally gave out and he stumbled to the canvas. Referee Benjy Esteves correctly ruled no knockdown, wiped off the gloves and the action continued, but now Rosario could measure his target. He quickly backed a woozy Williams into a corner and a rocket right uppercut landed flush, and the left hook behind it prompted Esteves to call a halt. Immediately after the stoppage, Williams (27-2-1, 16 KOs) looked out into the vast crowd and mouthed the word that was on everyone's lips: "Wow!" There's a new player at junior middleweight, and his name is Jeison Rosario.

Omar Aguilar is the latest young Mexican fighter to receive his country's mixed blessing of high expectations.

NEW FACES

OMAR AGUILAR

By **Anson Wainwright**

Over the years, Mexico has produced a plethora of world champions. Canelo Alvarez is currently the most popular boxer in the world. He has followed in the illustrious footsteps of Ruben Olivares, Carlos Zarate, Salvador Sanchez, Julio Cesar Chavez, Marco Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales and Juan Manuel Marquez.

We're always looking for the next Mexican star, and wherever that speculation falls, it heaps an awful lot of pressure on somebody's shoulders. Omar Aguilar, a heavy-handed junior welterweight who knocked out all five of his opponents in 2019, has risen to the fore.

"I feel very happy," Aguilar (16-0, 15 knockouts) told The Ring. "I don't think that I have done anything yet, but I am moving forward, little by little. Every time, I feel more comfortable in the ring and I hope to achieve something big."

Aguilar, 20, was born and raised in the coastal city of Ensenada, about 50 miles south of Tijuana. He is the middle child of three in a working-class family.

"My early years were good," he explained. "I was always with my family. They're very loving – with some scolding and punishment, but I think it is necessary. I never worked, just helped at home to sweep, wash dishes, et cetera. My parents always tried to give me the best but couldn't always. But thanks to God, I never missed anything."

Aguilar's path into the sport was natural; he looked up to his father, whose passion was boxing.

"It is my father's fault I became interested in boxing," he said, laughing. "He had pictures of boxers, watched videos, had gloves and other things.

"I didn't box at the beginning; I played soccer, baseball, swimming, athletics. But in the end, I told my dad that I wanted to box. I was not a fighter or anything; I just wanted to try, and I went to the gym, Club Aparicio, but I was 6 and Rodolfo Aparicio told me I was too small. I went back a year later and he accepted me. Everything started from there. I liked it more and I started to fight."

"Pollo" went 194-21 as an amateur, winning several national competitions. He now trains under his father's guidance alongside his younger brother, Ruben, a talented 19-year-old junior welterweight. Aguilar is in his fourth semester at the Autonomous University of Baja California, where he's studying industrial engineering.

The youngster feels he has several strengths and is constantly working to improve his game.

"I really like hitting the body," he said of his trademark left hook to the liver. "I think I'm accurate and I throw good combinations. I think that I need more waist movement. I cover myself well with my hands and I do roll with the punches, but I think I also need more leg movement."

His promoter, Fernando Beltran of Zanfer Promotions, believes the sky is the limit for his budding 140-pounder.

"Omar Aguilar is an old-school type of fighter," said Beltran. "He has the type of skill set the great ones develop with experience. This kid already has that. His left hook to the liver is the best I've seen from a prospect.

"His presence and the way he puts pressure on in the ring when he fights make me forget that I'm watching a prospect. He has a bright future. He will be making big noise this year. Make sure to remember his name."

The baby-faced assassin closed out 2019 impressively by stopping Francisco Hernandez in three rounds.

"It was a great victory against a great rival," he said. "I felt very good, more relaxed and calm. Although he moved well, I caught up with him and stopped him."

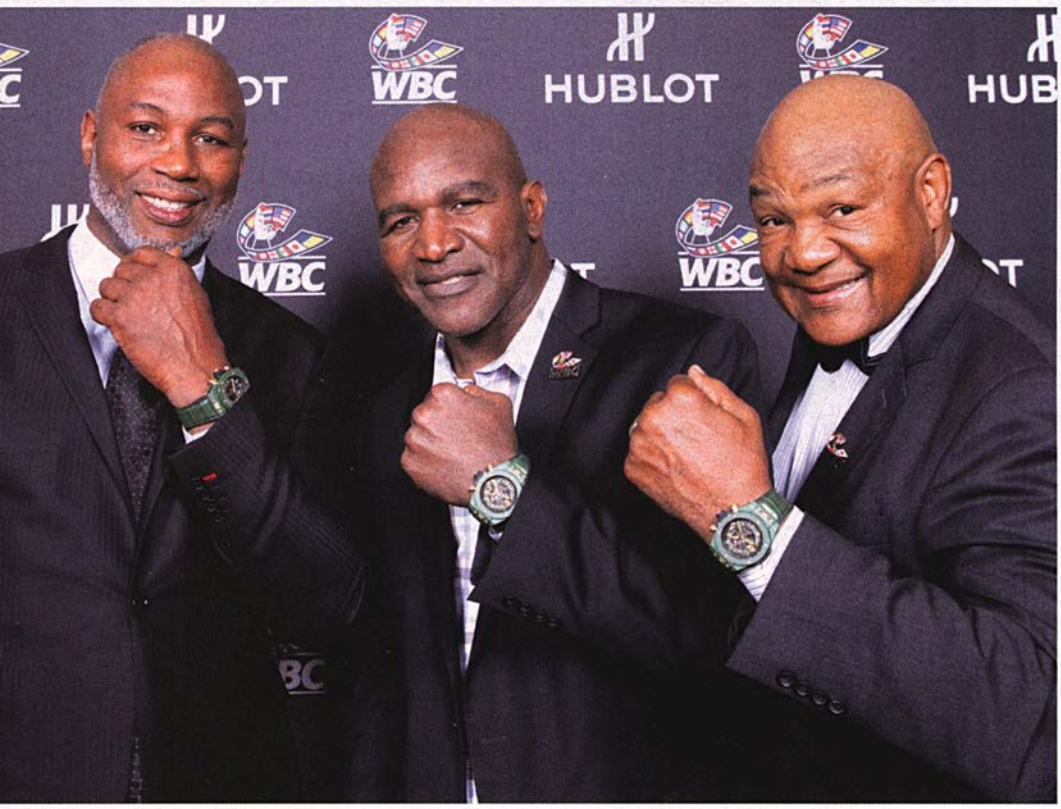
Like most Mexican fighters, Aguilar looks up to Julio Cesar Chavez and hopes to emulate his achievements, though he acknowledges there is a lot of work to do.

"Like most fighters, I want to be world champion in several divisions," he said. "I honestly believe that I still need to learn much more, but I am closer than I was before. And when that time comes, I will be ready."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER



GEORGE FOREMAN AS PATRIARCH

George Foreman is in the history books as the oldest man to claim the heavyweight throne, a distinction he earned at age 45 when he knocked out Michael Moorer on November 5, 1994. But as of this writing, Foreman holds another distinction related to his age. He's boxing's oldest living former heavyweight champion.

Foreman was born on January 10, 1949. That makes him 71 years old, almost 10 months older than Larry Holmes, who was born on November 3, 1949. George also has the distinction at present of being the earliest reigning heavyweight king who's still alive.

Asked by The Ring how he has dealt physically and emotionally with the passage of time, Foreman notes, "Physical things are done now purely as entertainment and for well-being. Such a joy that it's never done for pride and bill-paying."

As for his thoughts on being boxing's oldest living former heavyweight champion and the earliest reigning heavyweight champion who's still alive, George responds, "I remember how much I miss the old champs. How I tried to get the attention of Jack Dempsey; my friendship with Sonny Liston; how Joe Frazier was such a frightful boxer and gentle man; the funny and exciting days of Muhammad Ali. The years have now made me the spokesman for every heavyweight champ that I met. So I have many years and also a great responsibility."

Meanwhile, any thoughts that Foreman might have of becoming the oldest living former heavyweight champion ever should be put on hold. Max Schmeling, who claimed the vacant heavyweight throne with a victory over Jack Sharkey in 1930, lived to be 99 years old.

★ ★ ★

Kyle Sarofeen is a lifelong boxing fan who has worked in the publishing industry for two decades. Andy Komack, also a fan, has expertise in digital marketing

Lennox Lewis and Evander Holyfield are elder statesmen in their own right, but George Foreman is the king.

strategies and strategic partnership development. Together, they've founded Hannibal Boxing Media – a media company dedicated to the sweet science.

HBM owns and operates HannibalBoxing.com, a website originally conceived as a vehicle to market books that Sarofeen and Komack planned to publish. But with a roster of solid writers headed by Carlos Acevedo and Jimmy Tobin, the website has become a destination in its own right.

Meanwhile, Sarofeen (publisher) and Komack (managing director) have launched Hamilcar Publications, an imprint devoted solely to publishing books about boxing.

Hamilcar offers fight fans a mix of new and reissued work. Its 2019 list was headed by Donald McRae's award-winning *Dark Trade*. In addition, the company reissued *Jacobs Beach: The Mob, the Garden, and the Golden Age of Boxing* by Kevin Mitchell and *Off the Ropes* (a biography of Ron Lyle) by Candace Taft. Two new titles – *Berserk* (a biography of Edwin Valero) by Don Stradley and *The Ghost of Johnny Tapia* by Paul Zanon, each a short book – have also been published.

Titles scheduled for 2020 include *Sporting Blood* (collected essays) by Carlos Acevedo; *Killed in Brazil* (Jimmy Tobin's take on Arturo Gatti); *Slaughter in the Streets* (about the Boston mob and boxing) by Don Stradley; *Macho Time* by Christian Giudice; *Shot at a Brothel* (Patrick Connor's recounting of the life and death Oscar Bonavena); *(Low)life: A Memoir of Jazz, Fight-Fixing, and The Mob* by Charles Farrell; and *Bundini* by Todd Snyder.

Hannibal Boxing Media is self-funded, primarily by Komack. Sarofeen says that Hamilcar pays advances and royalties to authors "at the industry rate for this type of book" and that sales to date have been "modest but respectable." Their editorial philosophy is "to avoid the standard boxing biography and weave boxing in with broader cultural elements."

So far, so good.

★ ★ ★

SOME THOUGHTS FROM FIGHTERS AFTER THEY LOST

Jack Dempsey (on his "long-count" defeat to Gene Tunney in their 1927 rematch): "It was just one of the breaks. Tunney fought a smart fight."

King Levinsky (after being knocked out by Joe Louis in 1935): "It's not the blows, as much as they hurt. It's all them witnesses."

Roberto Duran (after his 1972 loss to Esteban De Jesus): "I don't like him, mostly because he is the only man ever to beat me and he is the only man to ever knock me down. I don't like him for a lot of reasons, but I have to respect him for them."

★ ★ ★

Each year, I'm charged with polling past winners of the Nat Fleischer Award for Career Excellence in Boxing Journalism to determine who the next honoree will be. The award differs from others given out by the Boxing Writers Association of America in that only past recipients are eligible to vote.

Most of the nomination process and final voting is conducted by email. But the emails lead to telephone calls and a chance to catch up with old friends. As 2019 drew to a close, I reached out to Jay Searcy for his vote and learned that he'd died four days after Christmas the previous year, shortly after our last conversation.

Searcy made his mark in boxing by writing for a wide range of publications and serving as sports editor for the Philadelphia Inquirer. "He was a great writer," Jerry Izenberg remembers. "He saw things in and out of the ring that not many people see."

Jay was also tied to a unique undertaking and the best-kept secret in the history of war.

In the early-1940s, a town not seen on civilian maps, whose residents were subject to strict censorship and ruled by military decree, was built virtually overnight in eastern Tennessee. It was created to serve as administrative headquarters for a team of scientists and military leaders charged with developing an atomic bomb.

Searcy's parents were part of that team. Jay, like other children of school age, attended a hastily constructed school. In a 2010 memoir entitled *The Last Reunion*, he recalled, "We lived in plywood homes, showered in community bathhouses, sat on chamber pots. We walked to school in construction mud, stood in lines for rationed goods. We lived the mystery – felt it, touched it, smelled it – though we didn't know what it was. And except for a few, neither did our parents. Then, on August 6, 1945, when the bomb destroyed sixty percent of Hiroshima, everybody knew."

Jay Searcy was a craftsman with words and such a nice man. A lot of people, myself included, will miss him.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – A Dangerous Journey: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

BROOKLYN-BORN AND HARVARD LAW SCHOOL-BRED

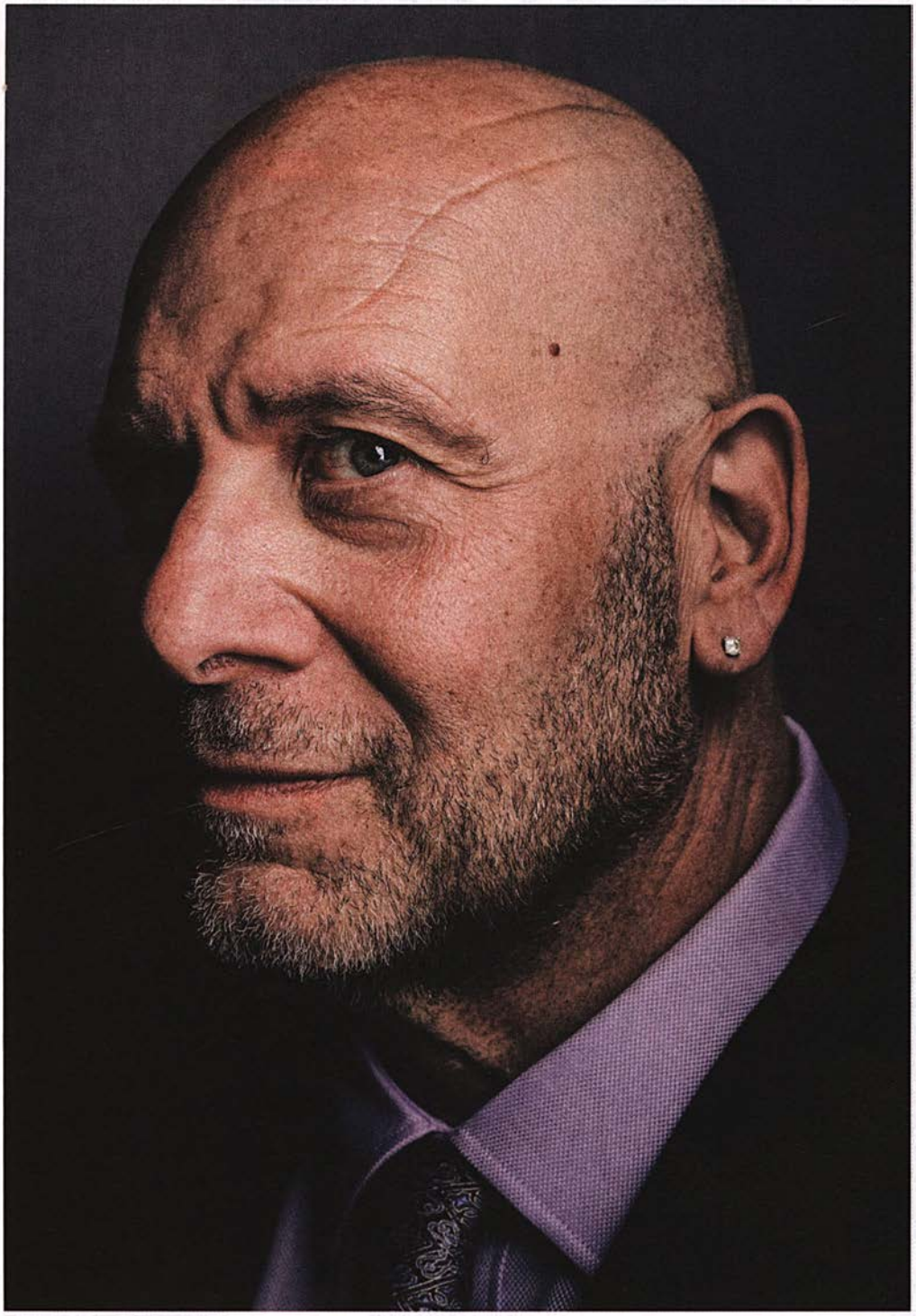
THE FACE OF BOXING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOJTEK URBANEK
TEXT BY THOMAS HAUSER

Brooklyn has produced some outstanding fighters over the years. Mike Tyson, Riddick Bowe, Mark Breland, Shannon Briggs, Danny Jacobs, Zab Judah, Paulie Malignaggi, Michael Moorer and Eddie Mustafa Muhammad come quickly to mind. Harvard Law School has less of a connection to boxing. But on occasion, the twain do meet.

Bob Arum was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn on December 8, 1931. He went to Erasmus Hall High School (fellow alumni included Barbra Streisand, Neil Diamond and Bobby Fischer), then NYU and Harvard Law School. After a stint on Wall Street, he was working in the tax division at the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. Floyd Patterson was about to defend his title against Sonny Liston and, reacting to rumors of financial chicanery, the Internal Revenue Service asked the tax division to impound all revenue from the fight's closed-circuit television outlets. Arum had never

BOB ARUM



seen a professional fight, but he could count. And the dollars involved left him very impressed. By the mid-1960s – working in tandem with Herbert Muhammad, John Ali, Lester Malitz and Jim Brown – he was promoting Muhammad Ali's fights.

Lou DiBella was born in Brooklyn on May 17, 1960. He went to Regis High School in Brooklyn and college at Tufts before graduating from Harvard Law School. In 1989, after four years in the corporate real estate department at Sullivan & Cromwell (a prominent Wall Street law firm), he joined HBO. Eleven years later, he left the network to found DiBella Entertainment.

"These were interesting men to photograph," Wojtek Urbanek says. "Arum is in his late 80s but he still has a powerful presence. He even came a little bit into my personal space. And photographing DiBella felt like photographing an artist or a magician. The shadows loved him."

Arum today is more Harvard Law School than Brooklyn. He left the borough of his birth long ago. DiBella now lives on Long Island but has held onto his Brooklyn roots. It's a point of pride for him that he has promoted more shows at Barclays Center in Brooklyn than any other promoter.

"I grew up in Brooklyn," DiBella says. "Emotionally, I've never left it. For more than a hundred years, Brooklyn has had its own culture as one of the great melting pots in America. It has diverse neighborhoods, all kinds of people, every ethnicity imaginable. From the day I was born, Brooklyn has been a constant in my life. I'll always love it."

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.

RATINGS
SUMMARY

The Ring Ratings through fights as of January 18, 2020

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

Kyotaro Fujimoto brought style to his fight against Daniel Dubois, but the Japanese heavyweight was overmatched from the beginning.

POUND FOR POUND

No changes.

HEAVYWEIGHTS

Kyotaro Fujimoto's feet were fleet, but it was clear in his first fight outside of Japan that he'd never met anyone with the punching power of Daniel Dubois, who didn't need to do anything more than plod his way to a second-round knockout win in London. Efe Ajagba was the same in California, where his punches inflicted instant drunkenness on Iago Kiladze whenever they landed, but the 6-foot-6 Nigerian surprisingly hit the canvas himself en route to a fifth-round knockout victory. So, vulnerabilities aside, Dubois (14-0, 13 KOs) and Ajagbe (12-0, 10 KOs), both unrated for now, each provided another example of why the buzz around their rise toward contendership remains loud. It looks like they'll be in action again in April and March, respectively.

CRUISERWEIGHTS

Former kickboxing star Alexsei Papin, who took his first loss in a majority decision at the hands of No. 4-rated Ilunga Makabu in August, was replaced at No. 10 by Thabiso Mchunu, who continued the theme of an African beating a Russian in Russia by upsetting former titleholder Denis Lebedev. Lebedev was making his first appearance in 13 months after reversing a vow to retire, and the layoff showed despite the high waistband protecting his tender abs from the younger and busier Mchunu.

WBA titleholder Arsen Goulamirian held his mark at No. 8 after stopping Constantin Bejenaru (unrated), who went down from a short left hook in the ninth and was saved from further damage by his corner before the 10th round began.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Jean Pascal (No. 8 last month) wrote part two of his 2019 comeback with an action-packed split decision over Badou Jack (No. 7) in Atlanta on December 28. Jack went down herky-jerky-style in Round 4 from an overhand right, and a similar punch sent Pascal into a headfirst dive that would've put him on the ringside commentators' table if not for the ropes. But Pascal's three-card shutout in the first five rounds clinched the scores in his favor – two cards of 114-112 for him and one for Jack by the same tally. The two men only switched places in the ratings by virtue of the close result, but Canelo Alvarez (No. 2) was concurrently dropped from the list after vacating his title, so the net result was that Jack stayed at No. 7 and Pascal rose to No. 6. Dominic Boesel moved in at 10 to fill the gap.

Joe Smith Jr., forever known as the guy who ended Bernard Hopkins' career in 2016, returned to the ratings at No. 9 after winning a split decision over Jesse Hart, who dropped off the list from No. 8. A higher entry point was suggested by one member of the Ring Ratings Panel, saying they felt Smith should be above Marcus Browne, "who looked really bad last fight against Pascal." Another agreed but countered that a loss to Pascal is still better than a loss to Sullivan Barrera, which is how Smith followed up his career-defining upset of Hopkins.

In his first fight since losing the WBO title to Sergey Kovalev in February 2019, Eleider Alvarez knocked out Michael Seals in the seventh round, going low to slip Seals' right hand while landing a devastating overhand right of his own. The punch put Seals out on his feet, where he teetered for a moment before falling unchecked onto his back – probably saved from a nasty head-bang on the edge of the ring by the bouncy bottom rope (the second rope-save of a 175-pounder this month). Alvarez remained at No. 5.

Joe Smith Jr. grinded his way back into the ratings against Jesse Hart.

MIKEY WILLIAMS FOR TOP RANK

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

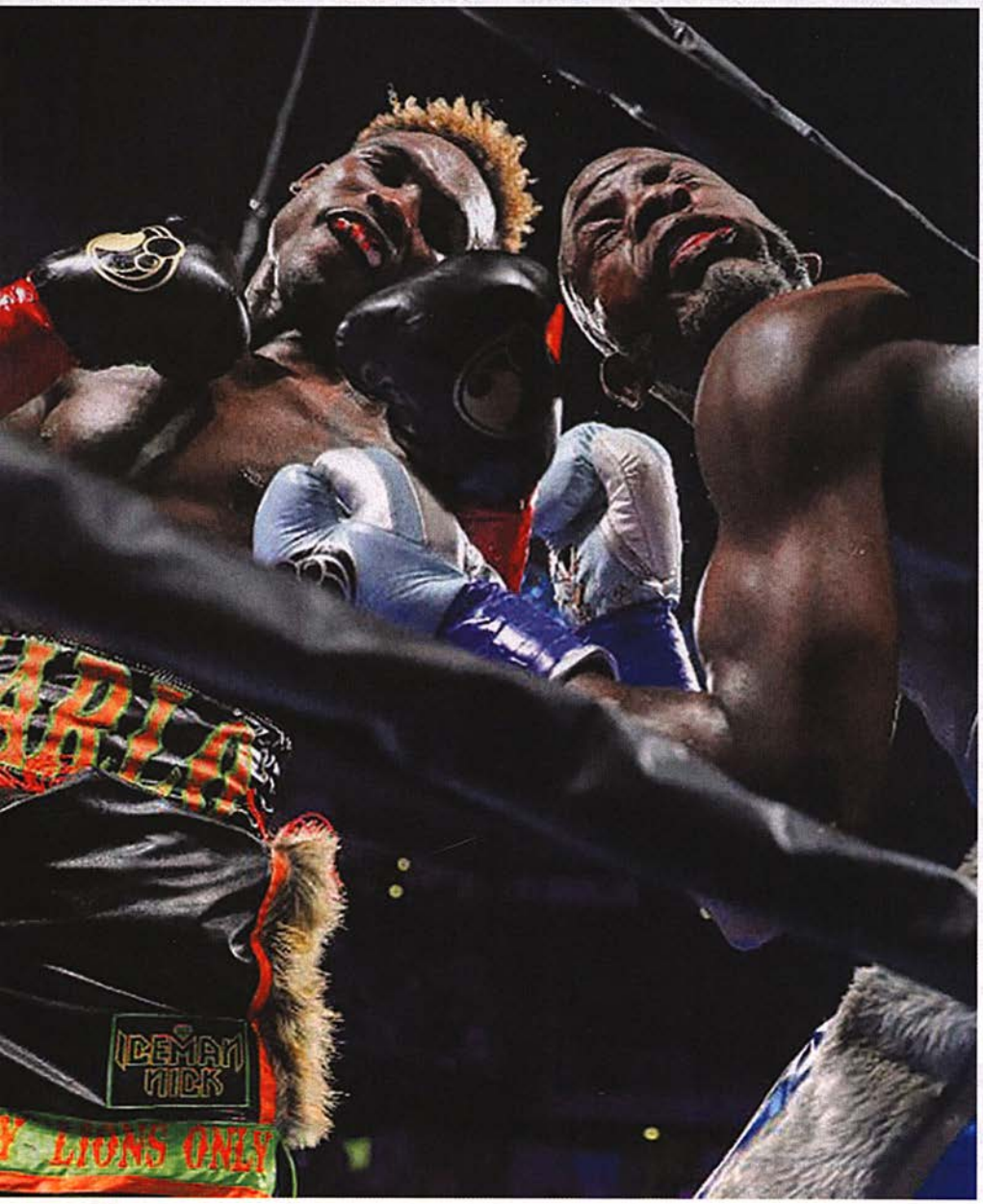
Daniel Jacobs, the No. 2-rated middleweight last month, didn't blow a lot of minds with his win over Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. and didn't crack the list – partly because the Brooklynite didn't look great and also because forcing Junior to quit in his corner after five rounds didn't represent a top 10-worthy accomplishment. This won't shock anybody who has followed Chavez's pro boxing hobby, but in addition to later surrendering, he weighed in about five pounds over the limit and paid a $1 million penalty. As one panelist put it, "I grew up idolizing Chavez Sr. and it's really sad to see his son, who can fight, do this to the family legacy." Jacobs did have one supporter who advocated for him to get the No. 10 spot based on his proven talent, but the man who presented a challenge for Canelo and Gennadiy Golovkin at 160 pounds will need to conquer a more credible opponent to see a ranking at 168.

Former titleholder Jose Uzcategui's rough patch continued with a close unanimous decision loss to Lionell Thompson (unrated) on the Pascal-Jack card. Uzcategui, rated No. 7 last month, dropped off the list and Avni Yildirim came in at 10 – though Yildirim will have to act fast if he wants to stay there; his last fight was a February 2019 loss to Anthony Dirrell by technical decision.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

With Jacobs vacating his No. 2 spot to face Chavez, an opening was left at No. 10. It was claimed by Liam Williams after a fifth-round beatdown of Alantez Fox on December 21 in London. Two days later in Japan, Ryota Murata dropped and stopped a game Steven Butler with a left hook in the fifth round to close out his year with another solid win, holding his position at No. 5.

Making his middleweight debut, Jaime Munguia (No. 4 junior middleweight last month) followed a now-familiar script against Gary O'Sullivan: Facing an older and wilier opponent, the 23-year-old Mexican got rattled by some early adversity but steadied himself, trusted his skills and settled into a more methodical route to victory, waiting for his moment to finish off "Spike" (though it's impossible to look at the Irishman and not think either "Bill the Butcher" or "Guy Fawkes") with a flurry in the 11th round. So he got the job done again, but the thing about Munguia is that he's already had 35 pro fights. In the land of elite 160-pounders, how long can he count on having opponents who can't deck him before he has a few rounds to work out his issues? The panel felt that he needs to demonstrate a more solid mindset from the opening bell against a top opponent before he breaks into the top 10.



Tony Harrison was unable to fend off the power-punching onslaught of a Jermell Charlo bent on revenge.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

The rematch between Tony Harrison (No. 6 last month) and Jermell Charlo (No. 7) happened one day short of a year after their first meeting, in which Harrison won a disputed decision to take Charlo's WBC title in Brooklyn. Harrison had no damns to give about controversy and came into the sequel with plenty of swagger, spending 11 rounds dispensing a mix of showboating and accurate, compact

boxing that scored well on the inside and at times had Charlo backing up. But it was Charlo's neon-accented gloves that left glowing afterimages in the air as he carved his way to Harrison's head and body with longer, sharper punches that obviously carried the higher risk of damage. He found the mark with a left hook that put Harrison down in Round 2, then again in Round 11. A follow-up flurry produced a third knockdown, and soon after that, referee Jack Reiss stepped in to end the fight.

With the title back in the Texan's hands, the Ratings Panel took up the question of where to place him on the list. The first suggestion was to move Charlo up just two spaces to No. 5. That triggered an immediate pushback: "So Charlo is now a two-time 154 titlist, with clean knockouts over Harrison and Erickson Lubin as well as strong wins over Austin Trout and Vanes Martirosyan … and he's ranked behind Munguia? (Note: The fight took place on December 21, when Munguia was still rated No. 4 at 154.) Charlo to No. 2 to me. His only loss wasn't even clear. Jarrett Hurd (No. 2 at the time) just had a clear loss. Erislandy Lara (No. 3) looked on the slide against Brian Castano. I think Charlo at No. 2 reflects a true picture of the division."

Another panelist went pro-Charlo when the criticism of "being behind" was brought up: "Charlo was actually ahead on two scorecards, and even if he was behind, a knockout in the championship rounds would have been equally impressive. I can easily see Jermell at No. 2 or No. 3. He just avenged his only loss by stoppage in what was a career-best win." Majority carried the day, and Charlo rose to No. 2 while Harrison dropped to No. 7.

Two weeks later, Munguia went up to 160 and Spain's Sergio Garcia took up the slack at No. 10. This would not last long.

The list got another shakeup when No. 1-rated Julian Williams, the man who created a 2019 Upset of the Year candidate with his unanimous decision over Hurd in May for a pair of belts, was himself taken down in a massive upset by Jeison Rosario (unrated). The 24-year-old Dominican, in his first 12-rounder and not considered a huge threat, power-wise, stunned Williams with a left hook early in the fifth round and essentially had two minutes to finish him off, which he finally accomplished when he teed off with a huge right uppercut and referee Benjy Esteves Jr. stepped in. Williams didn't argue. And just like that, "Banana" (one of the best nicknames in boxing, it's a tribute to the strength Rosario says he gets from the fruit that is so crucial to the Dominican economy) became a two-belt stud.

Charlo moved to No. 1 after Williams slipped to No. 3 and Rosario entered at No. 2. Hurd and Lara dropped two notches while everyone else lost a single spot.

Jeison 'Banana' Rosario went from unrated to No. 2 after demolishing Julian Williams in the fifth round.

WELTERWEIGHTS

Nobody on the Ratings Panel believes Jaron Ennis won't be in the top 10 soon, but they are a strict jury when it comes to real-world results. Ennis' fourth-round stoppage of Bakhtiyar Eyubov, as impressive as it was, wasn't enough to move him out of the 11-15 club.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

After his TKO loss to Jose Ramirez in July, Maurice Hooker took a step back and went in search of a fight to restore his confidence – a sensible plan for everyone but the confidence-booster, whose name was Uriel Perez. Hooker won the catchweight bout in

the first round and held his position at No. 6.

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Like Jacobs and Munguia, Gervonta Davis (No. 2 junior lightweight last month) made a successful jump to a higher weight class but didn't climb a mountain high enough to make the top 10. He struggled to find his groove against former featherweight titleholder Yuriorkis Gamboa (in Davis' world, you can dominate on the scorecards and inflict three knockdowns and still be "struggling"), but eventually got the stoppage in Round 12. One panelist still wanted to let Tank in, saying, "I agree defeating Gamboa is not a top-10 qualifier, but I never thought Davis was in danger of losing, despite sloppy patches. Secondly, the 135 division is shockingly weak in terms of talent below the top 5. This makes almost any of the top 10 at 130 moving up worthy of consideration. I would bring in Davis at No. 5 behind Commey. In terms of talent and what we know about Davis, it is pretty obvious he belongs in the ratings." The cold, cold hearts of the panel were unmoved by this stirring monologue, however. "Real-world results," they intoned.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

With Davis moving up, Leo Santa Cruz came in at No. 10, but he was soon replaced by young Brooklynite Chris Colbert, who won a unanimous decision over former titleholder Jezreel Corrales (unrated), complete with a knockdown in the 10th round.

FEATHERWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

No changes.

BANTAMWEIGHTS

Following three fights against Oscar Negrete (a win and two draws, all of them split), Joshua Franco finally got to see a new face on the Munguia-O'Sullivan undercard, stopping Jose Burgos in the ninth round. Franco held his position at No. 10.

Gervonta Davis got the job done in his first fight at lightweight, stopping Yuriorkis Gamboa in Round 12.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

He's back (again)! Roman Gonzalez, fighting for just the second time in the 27 months since his knockout loss to Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, dismantled Filipino Diomel Diocos en route to a second-round TKO on December 23 in Japan. It's hard to glean much about Chocolatito from a tuneup against an overmatched opponent, but the ending was familiar, with the former pound-for-pound king mixing beeline left hooks to the body and wickedly accelerated right hands into off-speed combos that used every angle available. The spring in his muscles definitely seems to have slipped a bit, but hey, the guy is 32 and has conquered four weight classes in his 50 fights. We'll find out a lot more when Gonzalez faces WBA titleholder Khalid Yafai on February 29, but for now he remains at No. 6.

Speaking of body shots, Kazuto Ioka handed out plenty of them in his narrow unanimous decision over Jeyvier Cintron in Japan on New Year's Eve. The lanky two-time Olympian from Puerto Rico was effective in peppering Ioka's face from the outside, but not enough to keep the defending titleholder out of the phonebooth, which is where Ioka did his damage. It was a really close fight, so both stayed put in the ratings, Ioka at No. 2 and Cintron at No. 9.

FLYWEIGHTS

With Julio Cesar Martinez (No. 4 last month) and Cristofer Rosales (No. 7 last month) sharing so many furious exchanges – the second round alone featured a night's worth of action – it seemed impossible that one of them wouldn't break before the 12-round limit in their battle for the vacant WBC title. It was Rosales who finally succumbed in the ninth round. And it was a much-needed clean win for Martinez following the scandal of his blatantly late hit on a downed Charlie Edwards in August – a fight that was ruled a no-contest. In the ratings, Martinez rose to No. 3 and Rosales fell to No. 9.

On the Murata-Butler card in Yokohama, Moruti Mthalane remained at No. 2 after stopping warhorse Akira Yaegashi (unrated) in the ninth round to defend his IBF belt, the referee stepping in during a lull to embrace the valiant former titleholder and save him from further pummeling. On the same card as Ioka-Cintron a week later, Kosei Tanaka protected his WBO title with a third-round knockout of Chinese challenger Wulan Tuolehazi. "Kosei Tanaka is a beast," one panelist summarized. "Man, what a great time for Japanese boxing fans – a true golden age. Tanaka remains No. 1 with ease."

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

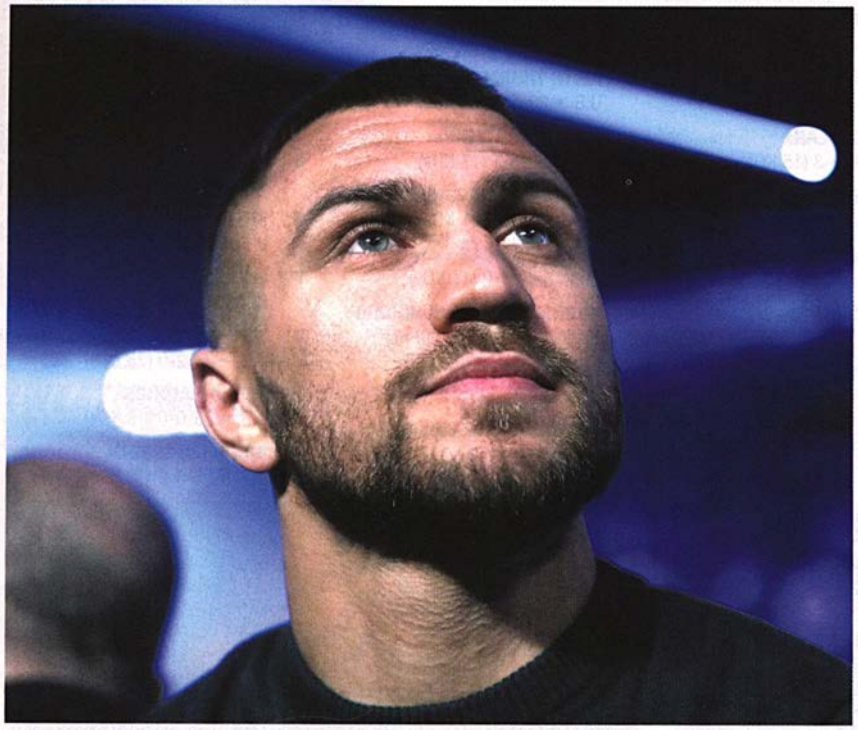
There was stiff competition, but the "body-puncher of the month" award goes to WBC titleholder Kenshiro Teraji (No. 1), who abused Randy Petalcorin's midsection to score four knockdowns – all from shots to the gut – before Petalcorin (unrated) finally stayed down in the fourth round.

STRAWWEIGHTS

No stranger to the list, Nkosinathi Joyi returned at No. 10 to replace Joey Canoy, whom he widely outpointed in front of his home fans in South Africa.

RATINGS

The Ring Ratings through fights as of Jan. 18, 2020



Vasiliy Lomachenko waits patiently for his next assignment. Possibilities include unification against Luke Campbell or war against Teofimo Lopez.

1 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)

3 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)

4 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 36-0-0 (27 KOs)

5 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)

6 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)

7 **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)

8 **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)

9 **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C **(VACANT)**

1 **TYSON FURY**
U.K. • 29-0-1 (20 KOs)

2 **DEONTAY WILDER**
U.S. • 42-0-1 (41 KOs)

3 **ANTHONY JOSHUA**
U.K. • 23-1-0 (21 KOs)

4 **DILLIAN WHYTE**
U.K. • 27-1-0 (18 KOs)

5 **LUIS ORTIZ**
Cuba • 31-2-0 (26 KOs)

6 **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
U.S. • 33-2-0 (22 KOs)

7 **ALEXANDER POVETKIN**
Russia • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)

8 **JOSEPH PARKER**
New Zealand • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)

9 **MICHAEL HUNTER**
U.S. • 18-1-1 (12 KOs)

10 **ADAM KOWNACKI**
U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **MAIRIS BRIEDIS**
Latvia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

2 **YUNIER DORTICOS**
Cuba • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

3 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**
Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)

4 **ILUNGA MAKABU**
Congo • 26-2-0 (24 KOs)

5 **KEVIN LERENA**
S. Africa • 24-1-0 (11 KOs)

6 **ANDREW TABITI**
U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

7 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE**
U.K. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)

8 **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN**
France • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)

9 **MICHAL CIESLAK**
Poland • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

10 **THABISO MCHUNU**
S. Africa • 22-5-0 (13 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

2 **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**
Ukraine • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)

3 **DMITRY BIVOL**
Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 **SERGEY KOVALEV**
Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)

5 **ELEIDER ALVAREZ**
Colombia • 25-1-0 (13 KOs)

6 **JEAN PASCAL**
Canada • 35-6-1 (20 KOs)

7 **BADOU JACK**
Sweden • 22-3-3 (13 KOs)

8 **MARCUS BROWNE**
U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

9 **JOE SMITH JR.**
U.S. • 25-3-0 (20 KOs)

10 **DOMINIC BOESEL**
Germany • 30-1-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **CALLUM SMITH**
U.K. • 27-0-0 (19 KOs)

1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)

2 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ**
Mexico • 40-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 **CALEB PLANT**
U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)

5 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

6 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS**
U.K. • 29-0-0 (14 KOs)

7 **CALEB TRUAX**
U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)

8 **JOHN RYDER**
U.K. • 28-5-0 (16 KOs)

9 **FEDOR CHUDINOV**
Russia • 22-2-0 (15 KOs)

10 **AVNI YILDIRIM**
Turkey • 21-2-0 (12 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights as of January 18, 2020

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** Kaz. • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)
- **2** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** U.S. • 28-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **JERMALL CHARLO** U.S. • 30-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** Ukraine • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA** Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **KAMIL SZEREMETA** Poland • 21-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **7** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** U.K. • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **8** **MACIEJ SULECKI** Poland • 28-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **ROB BRANT** U.S. • 25-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **10** **LIAM WILLIAMS** U.K. • 22-2-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 32-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **2** **JEISON ROSARIO** Domin. Rep. • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **3** **JULIAN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 27-1-1 (16 KOs)
- **4** **JARRETT HURD** U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **ERISLANDY LARA** Cuba • 26-3-3 (15 KOs)
- **6** **BRIAN CASTANO** Argentina • 16-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **7** **TONY HARRISON** U.S. • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **MICHEL SORO** France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **ERICKSON LUBIN** U.S. • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **PATRICK TEIXEIRA** Brazil • 31-1-0 (22 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 36-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **3** **MANNY PACQUIAO** Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4** **KEITH THURMAN** U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5** **SHAWN PORTER** U.S. • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **6** **DANNY GARCIA** U.S. • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **YORDENIS UGAS** Cuba • 24-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **8** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV** Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **SERGEY LIPINETS** Russia • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** Lithuania • 21-1-1 (17 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **JOSE RAMIREZ** U.S. • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **2** **REGIS PROGRAIS** U.S. • 24-1-0 (20 KOs)
- **3** **IVAN BARANCHYK** Russia • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL** Ukraine • 31-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **KIRYL RELIKH** Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **6** **MAURICE HOOKER** U.S. • 27-1-3 (18 KOs)
- **7** **SUBRIEL MATIAS** Puerto Rico • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **JOSE ZEPEDA** U.S. • 31-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **9** **MARIO BARRIOS** U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **ARNOLD BARBOZA** U.S. • 23-0-0 (10 KOs)

Julian Williams (left) lost his No. 1 ranking after the upset loss to Rosario, making Jermell Charlo the new top dog in the 154-pound division.

Chris Colbert (right) was flashier fashion-wise than style-wise, but his win over Jezreel Corrales was enough for a spot in the 130-pound ratings.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** U.S. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **2** **DEVIN HANEY** U.S. • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **RICHARD COMMEY** Ghana • 29-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **LUKE CAMPBELL** U.K. • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **ROBERT EASTER** U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **6** **RYAN GARCIA** U.S. • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **JAVIER FORTUNA** Dom. Rep. • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **EMMANUEL TAGOE** Ghana • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **9** **RANCES BARTHELEMY** Cuba • 27-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **10** **YVAN MENDY** France • 44-5-1 (22 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** Mexico • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)
- **2** **TEVIN FARMER** U.S. • 30-4-1 (6 KOs)
- **3** **JAMEL HERRING** U.S. • 21-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **4** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **RENE ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 32-8-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **MASAYUKI ITO** Japan • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **ANDREW CANCIO** U.S. • 21-5-2 (16 KOs)
- **8** **MIGUEL ROMAN** Mexico • 62-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **9** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV** Russia • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **CHRIS COLBERT** U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JOSH WARRINGTON** U.K. • 30-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **CARL FRAMPTON** U.K. • 27-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **XU CAN** China • 18-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **5** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** U.S. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **6** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR** Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **KID GALAHAD** U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **MARK MAGSAYO** Phil. • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **9** **JESSIE MAGDALENO** U.S. • 27-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **RUBEN VILLA** U.S. • 17-0-0 (5 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **DANIEL ROMAN** U.S. • 27-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **2** **REY VARGAS** Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** Mexico • 30-1-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** Cuba • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **TJ DOHENY** Australia • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **RYOSUKE IWASA** Japan • 27-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **7** **BRANDON FIGUEROA** U.S. • 20-0-1 (15 KOs)
- **8** **TOMOKI KAMEDA** Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **9** **ISAAC DOGBOE** Ghana • 20-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN** Armenia • 18-3-0 (15 KOs)

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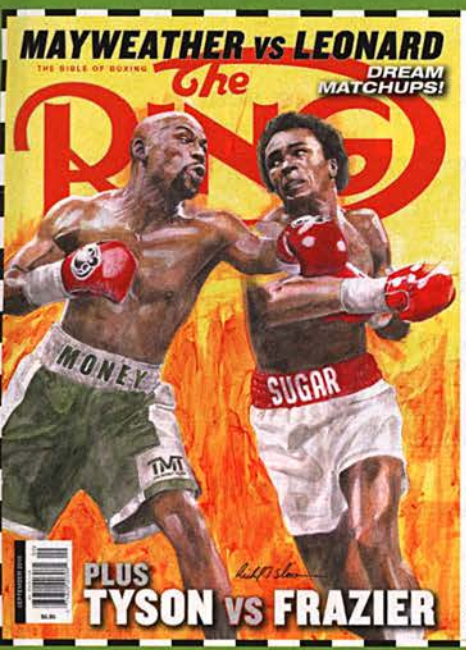

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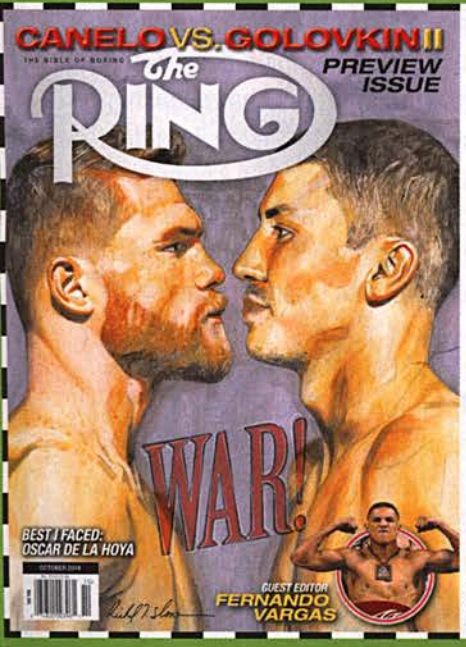

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RATINGS

Through fights as of January 18, 2020

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE** Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **NORDINE OUBAALI** France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** Philippines • 29-4–0 (20 KOs)
- **4** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ** P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ZOLANI TETE** S. Africa • 28-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **JASON MOLONEY** Australia • 20-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **7** **CARLOS CUADRAS** Mexico • 39-3-1 (27 KOs)
- **8** **JOSHUA GREER** U.S. • 22-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **9** **TAKUMA INOUE** Japan • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **10** **JOSHUA FRANCO** U.S. • 16-1-2 (8 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI** Thailand • 47-5-1 (41 KOs)
- **2** **KAZUTO IOKA** Japan • 25-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **3** **DONNIE NIETES** Phil. • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
- **4** **KHALID YAFAI** U.K. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** Phil. • 32-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **6** **ROMAN GONZALEZ** Nicaragua • 48-2-0 (40 KOs)
- **7** **ANDREW MOLONEY** Australia • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **8** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.** Mexico • 33-4-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **JEYVIER CINTRON** P.R. • 11-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **ALEJANDRO BARRIOS** Mexico • 21-2-5 (11 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KOSEI TANAKA** Japan • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **MORUTI MTHALANE** S. Africa • 39-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **3** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** Mexico • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** Ukraine • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **5** **CHARLIE EDWARDS** U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **ANDREW SELBY** U.K. • 13-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **7** **MASAYUKI KURODA** Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **8** **JUNTO NAKATANI** Japan • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **9** **CRISTOFER ROSALES** Nicaragua • 29-5-0 (20 KOs)
- **10** **GIEMEL MAGRAMO** Phil. • 24-1-0 (20 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **KENSHIRO TERAJI** Japan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **HEKKIE BUDLER** S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **3** **CARLOS CANIZALES** Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **FELIX ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
- **5** **ELWIN SOTO** Mexico • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **TETSUYA HISADA** Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EDWARD HENO** Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)
- **8** **SHO KIMURA** Japan • 18-3-2 (11 KOs)
- **9** **DANIEL VALLADARES** Mexico • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **10** **DANIEL MATELLON** Cuba • 10-0-2 (6 KOs)

Kazuto Ioka and Jeyvier Cintron were both all business before and after their fight on New Year's Eve.

No. 1-rated 108-pounder Kenshiro Teraji put Randy Petalcorin through a painful (but thankfully short) night.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** Thailand • 54-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **2** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** Thailand • 20-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** Puerto Rico • 15-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **4** **BYRON ROJAS** Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **5** **VIC SALUDAR** Phil. • 20-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **JOSE ARGUMEDO** Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **SIMPIWE KONKCO** S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)
- **8** **PEDRO TADURAN** Phil. • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **CARLOS LICONA** U.S. • 15-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **10** **NKOSINATHI JOYI** South Africa • 29-5-1 (19 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

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Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

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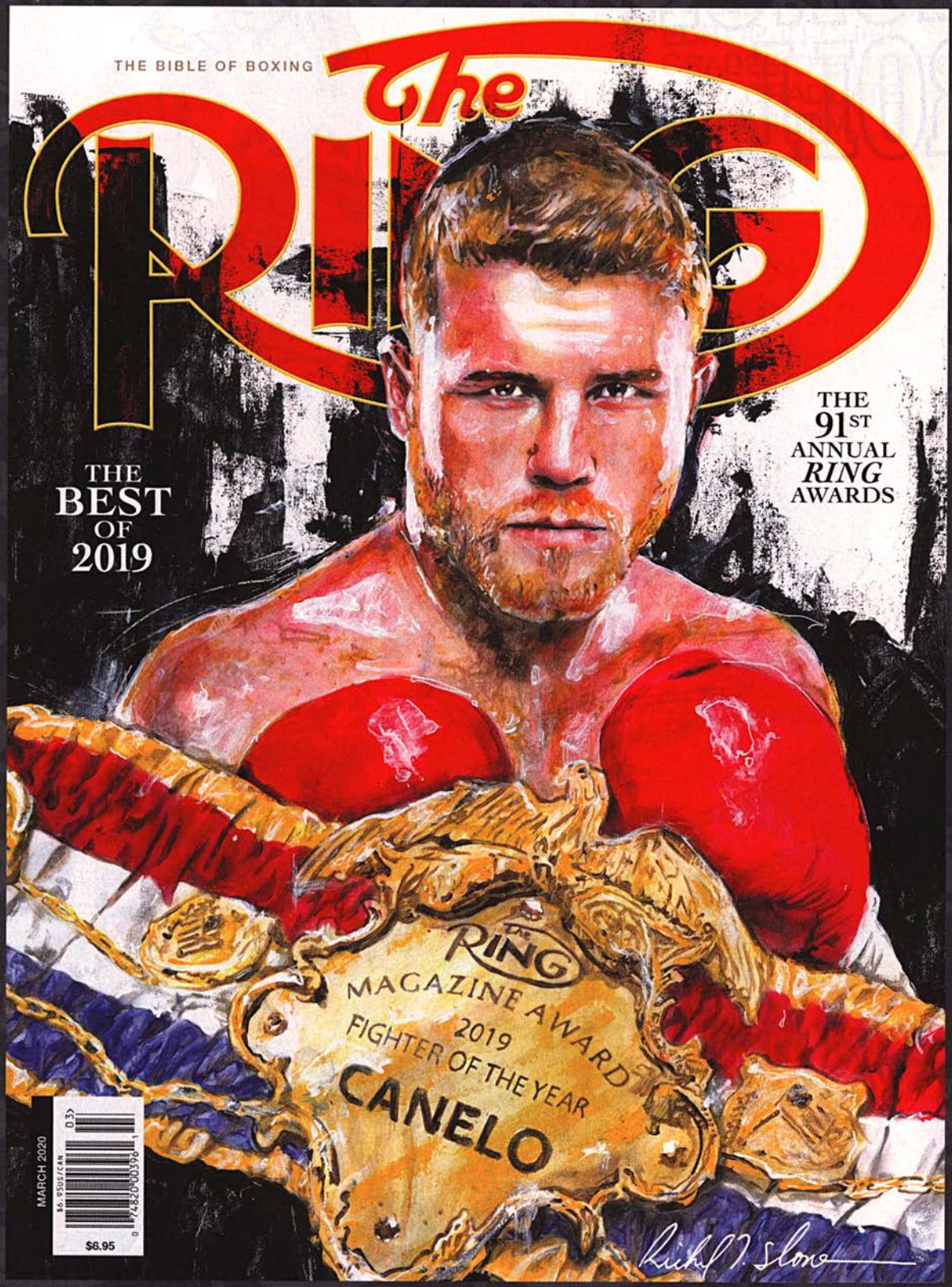

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HONOR ROLL

TEN UP-AND-COMERS ARE AT THE TOP OF THEIR CLASS GOING INTO 2020. THE RING'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF GRADES THEM BEFORE THEY GRADUATE TO STARDOM.

By **Doug Fischer**

KIRK AHART

HONOR ROLL

With promoters utilizing social media to showcase off-network undercards, and DAZN and ESPN+ streaming entire fight cards, hardcore boxing fans have the option of watching more developing young fighters learn their craft than ever before.

Too many notable up-and-comers made strides in 2019 to mention in one article, and many will evolve into legitimate contenders over the next 12-24 months. Some will win world titles in that time.

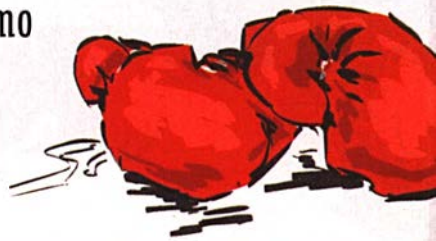
But how many of the countless boxing prodigies that we watched last year have star potential? How many made statements that put the elite fighters in their respective weight classes on notice? How many already have dedicated followings? How many attract media coverage beyond the usual boxing websites and YouTube channels? How many are must-see TV no matter who they fight?

This article seeks to evaluate the special few that have got "it" - whatever "it" may be - the ability, charisma, personality or aura about them that attracts the attention of fans, media, insiders, even those who don't regularly follow boxing, and says: "I'm ready to fight the best and seize the spotlight right now."

These 10 boxers - all talented, skilled, ambitious students of the game between the ages of 21-25 - moved to the head of the Class of 2019 and appear Most Likely to Succeed in 2020 and beyond.

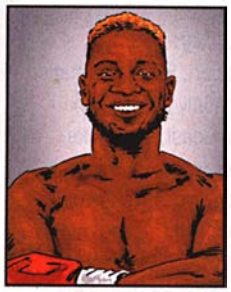
They are (in alphabetical order): Chris Colbert, Gervonta Davis, Daniel Dubois, Ryan Garcia, Jaron Ennis, Devin Haney, Teofimo Lopez, Vergil Ortiz Jr., Shakur Stevenson and Xu Can.

Let's go over their statistics and report cards:



ILLUSTRATIONS BY KRONK AAART

CHRIS COLBERT



Age: 23
Record: 14-0 (5 KOs)
Weight class: Junior lightweight
Ring ranking: No. 10
Boxing style: Boxer-technician
Promoter/Platform: Premier Boxing Champions/FOX

Talent/Athleticism: B+
Colbert is gifted with the high level of savvy, speed and agility that you'd expect from a former U.S. amateur standout who compiled a 113-3 record.

Skill/Technique: A
Colbert, a student of the game, has textbook boxing fundamentals. He's an elusive ring general with a quick jab, nimble feet and pinpoint counterpunching ability.

Excitement factor: C+
The kid used to call himself "Lil BHopp," modeling his style after the late-40s version of Bernard Hopkins (with elements of Floyd Mayweather's shoulder roll mixed in), so you know he's not for everyone, although his fast hands and punch accuracy occasionally produce eye-catching KOs (as was the case vs. 40-bout veteran Miguel Beltran Jr. last September).

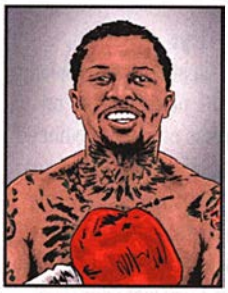
Media savvy: B
Colbert wants to be the center of our attention (hence the hair color and nickname changes and the fun he has with flashy ring-walk attire), so he isn't shy about sharing his inspirational story with the right people, such as filmmaker/journalist Jay Bulger, whose 2017 Netflix documentary *CounterPunch* chronicled the Brooklyn native's transition from amateur talent to pro prospect.

Popularity: C
East Coast insiders and hardcore heads know who Colbert is, and being in *CounterPunch* helped get his name out, but he's still unknown to general fans. However, he's got a brash, potentially polarizing personality that could draw more attention once he reaches main event status.

Last performance: B
Colbert was booed for stretches during his 12-round unanimous decision over former titleholder Jezreel Corrales, who he dropped in Round 10. The victory was uneventful, but it enabled him to crack The Ring's 130-pound rankings.

Overall grade/Comments: B+
Corrales' awkward style disrupted Colbert's rhythm and helped make for a somewhat disappointing Fox-televised step-up bout, but more aggressive opponents should make for better fights as he continues to develop.

GERVONTA DAVIS



Age: 25
Record: 23-0 (22 KOs)
Weight class: Lightweight
Ring ranking: Unranked
Boxing style: Aggressive boxer-puncher
Promoter/Platform: Mayweather Promotions/Showtime

Talent/Athleticism: A
"Explosive" is the best way to describe Davis' boxing prowess and ring presence. The squat southpaw is blessed with world-class power and speed.

Skill/Technique: B+
Davis is not subtle, as his nickname "Tank" indicates, but there's craft to his power game, which is not surprising given his extensive amateur career (which he finished with a 206-15 record). He times his money punch – the left – very well, often from unpredictable angles once in range. He neglects his jab at times, but he's a good body-puncher and finisher.

Excitement factor: A
The former two-time junior lightweight beltholder has the ability and mentality to force knockouts. Nobody's going to complain about a mini-Mike Tyson.

Popularity: A
Tank has put butts in the seats in his native Baltimore, Southern California and most recently in Atlanta, drawing crowds of up to 14,000 in major arenas. He does strong TV ratings and also moves the needle on social media (2 million Instagram followers).

Media savvy: B+
He's not always great (or on time) with the general sports media, but he's well received by "new media" and non-boxing outlets (music and entertainment, YouTubers, etc.).

Last performance: B
Tank underperformed against a faded, injured Yuriorkis Gamboa on December 28. The former featherweight titleholder had moments and, despite multiple knockdowns, somehow lasted into Round 12 with a damaged Achilles tendon.

Overall grade/Comments: B+/A-
Mayweather Promotions views Davis as a pay-per-view star (see Michael Montero's feature article on page 50 for details) and he may well become that. Only Davis, who has twice missed weight for major fights, can derail his own rise.

DANIEL DUBOIS

Age: 22
Record: 14-0 (13 KOs)
Weight class: Heavyweight
Ring ranking: Unrated
Boxing style: Boxer-puncher
Promoter/Platform: Queensberry Promotions/ESPN+ (in the U.S.) and BT Sport (in the U.K.)

Talent/Athleticism: A
Fast, fluid and energetic for a big man (6-foot-5, 240 pounds), Dubois carries world-class power (especially in his right hand), keen finishing instincts and a veteran's poise. He also appears to have the level of stamina and durability needed to realize his potential.

Skill/Technique: B
Dubois has solid all-around boxing form – a heavy jab, crisp combinations, proper balance and judge of distance – but it's clear that he's still a work in progress. He's a bit stiff in the upper body, he can be overly methodical (as he thinks through his plan of attack), and he can get wild when gunning for a stoppage.

Excitement factor: A
Dubois has a search-and-destroy mentality to back up his boxing talent and athleticism. So far, he's been every bit as entertaining as Anthony Joshua was as a prospect.

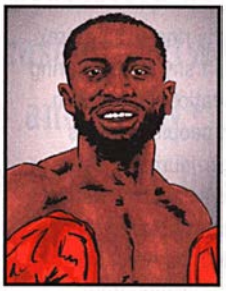
Popularity: A
Dubois is a star-in-the-making in the U.K., piggybacking on the success of more-advanced British heavyweight standouts, including Joshua, Tyson Fury, Dillian Whyte and Derek Chisora. Promoter Frank Warren kept him busy last year (five bouts), which has elevated his profile, and his down-to-earth character also resonates with the U.K. public.

Media savvy: B
Dubois' personality doesn't match his "Dynamite" nickname and ring prowess. He's not as vibrant and engaging as Fury, Whyte and Chisora are in interviews, and he's not as articulate as Joshua, but he's humble, genuine and thoughtful when on camera.

Last performance: B+
Dubois blasted woefully overmatched Kyotaro Fujimoto in two rounds on December 21. A single right hand did the job.

Overall grade/Comments: B+/A-
Dubois is ranked in the WBO's top 10, but at 22 years old, there's no reason to rush the British and Commonwealth champion to a world title (and Warren knows how to develop talent). Dubois is ready for fringe contenders, and a proposed April 18 showdown with 2016 Olympic silver medalist Joe Joyce, ordered by the British Boxing Board of Control, should let us know if he's ready to crack The Ring's top 10.

JARON ENNIS



Age: 22
Record: 25-0 (23 KOs)
Weight class: Welterweight
Ring ranking: Unrated
Boxing style: Boxer-speedster/Philly fighter
Promoter/Platform: NOW Boxing Promotions/Showtime

Talent/Athleticism: A
Ennis appears to be the total package in terms of boxing ability and physical tools: speed, power, agility, reflexes, coordination, balance and poise.

Skill/Technique: A
His hands are fast and his combinations are flashy, but there's defense and substance behind his offensive switch-hitting "sizzle" thanks to a solid amateur career (culminating with a national Golden Gloves title and a 58-3 record) and growing up in a boxing family (his father and two older brothers boxed professionally – read Joseph Santoliquito's story on Ennis on page 60 for more details).

Excitement factor: A
Ennis is a high-volume combination-puncher who loves to go to the body and stay in the pocket. In other words, he likes to scrap. He's got the talent and athleticism to easily control distance and outbox his opponents, but he prefers to break them down.

Popularity: B
Like Colbert, Ennis' reputation is still mainly confined to the East Coast, but unlike the Brooklynite, Ennis has a more fan-friendly style that is gradually attracting more attention thanks to recent appearances on Showtime.

Media savvy: B+
Ennis doesn't have the same showmanship when being interviewed that he exhibits in the ring, but he's comfortable and well-spoken with the media, which is already enamored with the "Philly Fighter" mystique he exudes. Despite only fighting twice vs. mid-level opposition in 2019, Ennis was almost voted Prospect of the Year by The Ring's Ratings Panel.

Last performance: B+
Ennis overwhelmed once-beaten Bakhtiyar Eyubov on January 10, dropping the rugged pressure fighter twice in the opening two minutes of the bout before forcing the referee to stop the fight in Round 4. He could have made the fight easier by employing more lateral movement, but he's got that "Philly" mentality.

Overall grade/Comments: A-
It's only a matter of time before Ennis crashes The Ring's welterweight rankings (probably sooner rather than later). If Ennis were matched with the lower contenders in The Ring's 147-pound top 10 (Kudratillo Abdukakhorov, Sergey Lipinets and Egidijus Kavaliauskas) in his next fight, he'd be a heavy favorite.

RYAN GARCIA

Age: 21
Record: 19-0 (16 KOs)
Weight class: Lightweight
Ring ranking: No. 6
Boxing style: Boxer-speedster
Promoter/Platform: Golden Boy Promotions/DAZN

Talent/Athleticism: B+

Garcia is gifted with phenomenal hand speed, good power, quick reflexes and sneaky shot selection (especially with his right hand) that has produced highlight-reel knockouts. However, he's still growing into his man strength and has had his durability and stamina tested in the late rounds of distance bouts against solid veterans.

Skill/Technique: B

Garcia was a diamond in the rough as a prospect, exhibiting defensive and technical deficiencies such as being stiff in his upper body, failing to tuck his chin and not coordinating his jab with lateral movement. However, he has improved many flaws in the relatively short time he's been a part of Eddy Reynoso's stable of fighters. Garcia is far from a complete boxer (he still needs to work on his inside game) but he's getting better.

Excitement factor: A-

Garcia faded down the stretch in back-to-back 10-rounders in 2018, which did not make for entertaining fights. Doing more holding than punching in the late rounds against Jayson Velez and Carlos Morales brought out some boo birds in the Southern California audiences. However, he has ended most of his fights (including his last three) with crowd-pleasing KOs.

Popularity: A+

Garcia has the right blend of charisma, creativity and "boy band" good looks to earn modeling gigs at 19, become a social media star by 20 (4.6 million followers on Instagram and counting), and amass an ever-growing contingent of young fans (including lots of females) that have provided loud support at major venues and arenas in the L.A. area, New York City and Las Vegas. He's also polarizing, which means he's got a devoted demographic of salty old haters who tune in to see him get beaten.

Media savvy: A

Garcia is not just "good" with boxing and general sports media, giving them the kind of playful energy and clickbait sound bites that generate views, he's also adept at manipulating them into disseminating his message and agendas. Oscar De La Hoya has to be proud of the kid, even though his company has occasionally been on the opposite end of the upstart's social media wrath.

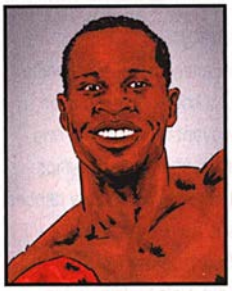
Last performance: A

Garica blasted Romero Duno with a right cross-hook combination in the first round on November 2. It was a statement KO in the spotlight of the Canelo-Kovalev event. Duno is no world-beater, but the young fringe contender is gutsy, hard-hitting and had never been stopped.

Overall grade/Comments: A-

Although still a work-in-progress, Garcia is coming into his own and 2020 figures to be a breakout year. At press time, he was set to headline a Valentine's Day show at the 18,000-seat Honda Center in Anaheim, California, vs. two-time title challenger Francisco Fonseca. Former Ring lightweight champ Jorge Linares is in the February 14 co-feature, and Golden Boy is building up to a crossroads match later in the year (probably July). However, the ambitious Garcia is already talking up a December showdown with Tank Davis.

DEVIN HANEY



Age: 21
Record: 24-0 (15 KOs)
Weight class: Lightweight
Ring ranking: No. 2
Boxing style: Boxer-stylist
Promoter/Platform: Matchroom Boxing USA/DAZN

Talent/Athleticism: A

The youngest member on the Honor Roll appears to be the most naturally gifted boxer of the bunch, having the perfect blend of speed, reflexes, mobility and versatility needed to emulate and master the styles of his two most notable mentors – Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Sr. The only thing he's missing is world-class power.

Skill/Technique: A

Haney's the total package in terms of boxing ability. He's got a sharp mind, an educated jab, accurate counterpunching ability, excellent head- and upper-body movement, as well as deft footwork and lateral movement.

Excitement factor: B

He can be entertaining when he's on the hunt, which has produced some impressive stoppages (vs. Mason Menard, Antonio Moran and Zaur Abdullaev), but he's also been in a few tedious distance bouts when he was content to outclass tough opponents (most notably Juan Carlos Burgos in 2018). Which version of Haney will we get when he faces world-class opposition?

Popularity: B

Purists love to witness Haney's skill set, while fight geeks and media members have already designated him as a future pound-for-pound player, so he's known to hardcore fans. "The Dream" is not as active and adept on social media as Garcia or Davis (although 553,000 Instagram followers ain't bad), and he doesn't sell tickets the way they do, but the potential to cross over and resonate with fans his age is there. It's not yet realized.

Media savvy: A

Haney is bright, polite, professional, articulate and ambitious, and the boxing press is attracted to his personality and potential. As an aspiring businessman who established his own promotional company as a teen, he understands the media's role in pushing his boxing brand.

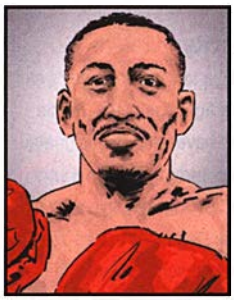
Last performance: B

Haney shut out unbeaten (12-0) but unheralded Alfredo Santiago over 12 rounds on November 9. He dropped Santiago with a pair of counter rights (his best punch) in Round 5 but couldn't put the rangy Dominican away in part because of Santiago's height and awkwardness, but also due to an injury to his right shoulder.

Overall grade/Comments: A-

Haney underwent surgery to repair his right shoulder (which he says completely popped out of the socket in Round 12 of the Santiago fight) in December, and the recovery period is expected to last six months. It's unknown whether Haney, who was beginning to struggle to make 135 pounds last year, will return to the lightweight division once healthy or make a foray into the 140-pound division, but he'll be a major player wherever he settles.

TEOFIMO LOPEZ



Age: 22
Record: 15-0 (12 KOs)
Weight class: Lightweight
Ring ranking: No. 1
Boxing style:
Boxer-puncher
Promoter/Platform:
Top Rank/ESPN

Talent/Athleticism: A

You don't have to be a boxing expert to recognize Lopez's athleticism and boxing talent. He's explosive and intuitive in the ring. Everything he does is dynamic (and usually damaging to his opponent) but also calculating, and it all seems to come naturally to him.

Skill/Technique: A

Lopez has a unique, aggressive counterpunching style. The former amateur standout is economical and frighteningly accurate with his jab and power punches. He's developed his own version of the shoulder roll and has proven to be a catch-and-shoot master with expert timing and aim.

Excitement factor: A

Lopez is arguably the best "power boxer" in the 135-pound division since a prime Shane Mosley. He blows out most opponents, and those tough enough to survive his blend of speed and power get beat up as they are outboxed. Also, Lopez isn't as nice as "Sugar Shane" was. He's got a flair for showmanship that sometimes borders on disrespect and a sadistic streak for opponents he doesn't like (see his brutal seventh-round KO of Diego Magdaleno). But all of this adds to his entertainment value.

Popularity: B+

Lopez definitely moves the needle. While not a social media maven, his flamboyant moves in the ring, chilling KOs, post-fight backflips and Fortnite-inspired victory dances have made more than a few of ESPN's SportsCenter Top 10 Plays of the Night. He's building a fan base in the New York City area, where he was born (Brooklyn) and has fought six of his 15 pro bouts (all at Madison Square Garden).

Media savvy: A

Lopez (along with his gregarious father-trainer, Teofimo Sr.) isn't shy with the media. He likes to make bold statements and have fun, but he's also honest and candid, admitting when he's disappointed with his preparation or performances and sharing his family drama (which the media, especially host network ESPN, eats up).

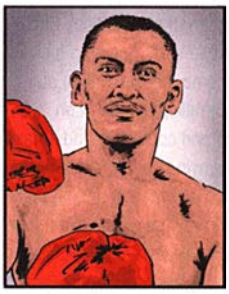
Last performance: A

Lopez made the statement he needed to prove that he's ready and worthy of challenging Ring champion Vasiliy Lomachenko by stopping Richard Commey in two rounds on December 14. A perfectly timed counter right hand dropped the world-class veteran, and Lopez quickly forced the referee's intervention with a brutal follow-up salvo.

Overall grade/Comments: A-

The 2018 Prospect of the Year is a major world titleholder and Ring's top-rated lightweight at age 22. Is the proposed May showdown with Lomachenko a bit premature for a young man with only one 12-round bout (vs. rugged Masayoshi Nakatani) under his belt? Maybe. But Lopez has the talent and style to make the most of the opportunity and advance his stature regardless of the outcome.

VERGIL ORTIZ



Age: 21
Record: 15-0 (15 KOs)
Weight class: Welterweight
Ring ranking: Unrated
Boxing style:
Boxer-puncher
Promoter/Platform:
Golden Boy/DAZN

Talent/Athleticism: B+

Ortiz is not remarkably fast or nimble – in fact, he's kind of methodical – but he's arguably the hardest-punching prospect in boxing, and he appears to have the conditioning and durability to carry his vaunted power into late rounds (although nobody, including grizzled veterans Antonio Orozco and Mauricio Herrera, has been able to last more than six).

Skill/Technique: A

The Texan is a stalking puncher, dangerous at long range and adept at cutting the ring off. Ortiz's punch selection is creative (especially with his right hand) and he's excellent at creating openings for his fight-ending power (which he does with feints, jabs, body shots, counterpunches or angles when in close). In a nutshell, he's got a search-and-destroy mentality but he's a patient, thinking fighter. However, the moment he hurts an opponent, he's a merciless finisher.

Excitement factor: A+

Ortiz is a bona fide KO artist, and nothing appeases fans – both hardcore and casual – more than home run hitters.

Popularity: B

Ortiz made great strides in 2019 by fighting four times, stopping former title challengers Herrera and Ortiz, and earning The Ring's Prospect of the Year award, but he hasn't yet attracted widespread attention outside of boxing's hardcore fans (in part because of his quiet demeanor).

Media savvy: B+

Ortiz is a thoughtful interview, but he's also shy and humble, not one to call out potential opponents or talk crap about rivals, which doesn't always connect well with the sensationalist aspects of "new" media. However, he's accessible and genuine, which "old" media appreciates.

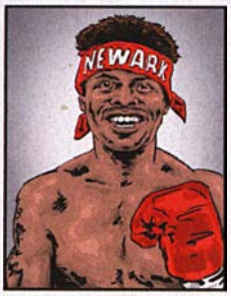
Last performance: A

Ortiz systematically broke down former fringe contender Brad Solomon to a fifth-round stoppage on December 13, expertly walking down the veteran stick-and-move specialist (who had never been knocked out).

Overall grade/Comments: B+/A-

Ortiz is scheduled to headline a card at The Forum in Inglewood, California, in late March. While his opponent is expected to be capable and durable, Ortiz won't be in with a top welterweight. Golden Boy knows time is on Ortiz's side and will not rush him (at least not this year). However, like Ennis, he'd be favored against The Ring's lower top 10-rated welterweights.

SHAKUR STEVENSON



Age: 22
Record: 13-0 (7 KOs)
Weight class: Featherweight
Ring ranking: No. 5
Boxing style: Boxer-technician
Promoter/Platform: Top Rank/ESPN

Talent/Athleticism: A

Not surprisingly, the most accomplished amateur on the Honor Roll (Stevenson is a 2016 Olympic silver medalist) is the most precocious, having won a major world title in his 13th pro bout. He did it with elite-level speed, reflexes and coordination, but also the steely focus and maturity of a seasoned veteran.

Skill/Technique: A

Stevenson is a sharpshooting southpaw who has mastered distance control and punching on the fly. His surgical hit-and-not-get-hit style is supported by an astute boxing mind and near-perfect punching mechanics, foot placement and timing.

Excitement factor: B

Technical boxers, especially those that stick and move as Stevenson does, are seldom embraced by all fans. But while the New Jersey native had a few uneventful six- and eight-round bouts while still developing his man strength in 2017 and 2018, knockouts of Viorel Simion, Jessie Rosales and Alberto Guevara are evidence that he's maturing physically and can be offensively dynamic.

Popularity: B

Stevenson's got buzz among hardcore fans and purists, and being an Olympic medalist featured on ESPN-televised Top Rank cards has given him valuable exposure to general sports fans, but he's yet to develop a dedicated following. His headliner vs. Guevara at the Prudential Center in Newark last July was a step in the right direction, and more East Coast main events are being lined up by Top Rank now that he's a world titleholder.

Media savvy: B+

Stevenson has some rough edges outside of the ring and off-camera (well, away from media cameras; a Miami Beach parking garage brawl that resulted in his arrest last summer was caught on security video), but the silver medalist is gold in TV and radio interviews. He can be as brash as he is bright and well-spoken during interviews, but his smile makes it all work.

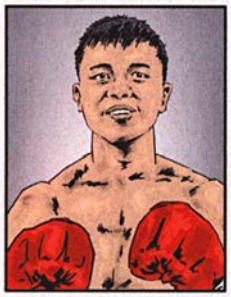
Last performance: A

Stevenson earned the vacant WBO title by dominating unbeaten contender Joet Gonzalez to a lopsided unanimous decision victory on October 26. He mastered his emotions by not getting caught up in the soap opera-like drama that troubled Gonzalez and his trainer-father (sparked by Shakur dating Gonzalez's sister), and he totally controlled the fight with a crisp jab, rapid straight lefts to the body and lateral movement.

Overall grade/Comments: B+/A-

Stevenson is guided by Top Rank and manager Andre Ward, experts in developing and understanding blue-chip talent. They believe he's ready for the best at 126 pounds. His first defense comes against former two-time title challenger Miguel Marriaga on March 14 at Madison Square Garden Theater. After that, a compelling title unification with Josh Warrington looms.

XU CAN



Age: 25
Record: 18-2 (3 KOs)
Weight class: Featherweight
Ring ranking: No. 4
Boxing style: Pressure fighter/volume puncher
Promoter/Platform: Golden Boy Promotions/ DAZN

Talent/Athleticism: B

Xu lacks world-class power and speed, but he more than makes up for this deficit with inhuman stamina and volume punching. He's big for a featherweight and appears to have the durability needed to employ his relentless style.

Skill/Technique: B

Despite being a "swarmer," Xu is fundamentally sound, exhibiting proper punching form and leverage. He's got good balance, understands distance (and how to close it), and is creative with his multiple punch selection.

Excitement factor: A

Xu is as game and entertaining as fighters come, gladly taking a few punches to land a salvo of his own. Watch his 12-round war with Jesus Rojas for evidence.

Media savvy: C+

Xu is shy and there aren't many boxing writers fluent in Chinese, so the language barrier could hurt his U.S. press. However, he exudes the kind of positive confidence outside and inside the ring (highlighted by a cheeky smile flashed even during the heat of battle) that media members (and fans) are attracted to.

Popularity: C

He's still under the radar in America, and maybe even in China, but his reputation grows with each fight. Golden Boy's challenge in 2020 is to continue matching Xu in good fights while marketing him in U.S. cities with strong Chinese populations.

Last performance: A-

Xu shined vs. unbeaten Manny Robles III on November 23, soundly outpointing the game and talented prospect while smashing the CompuBox record for most punches thrown in a featherweight fight (1,562).

Overall grade/comments: B

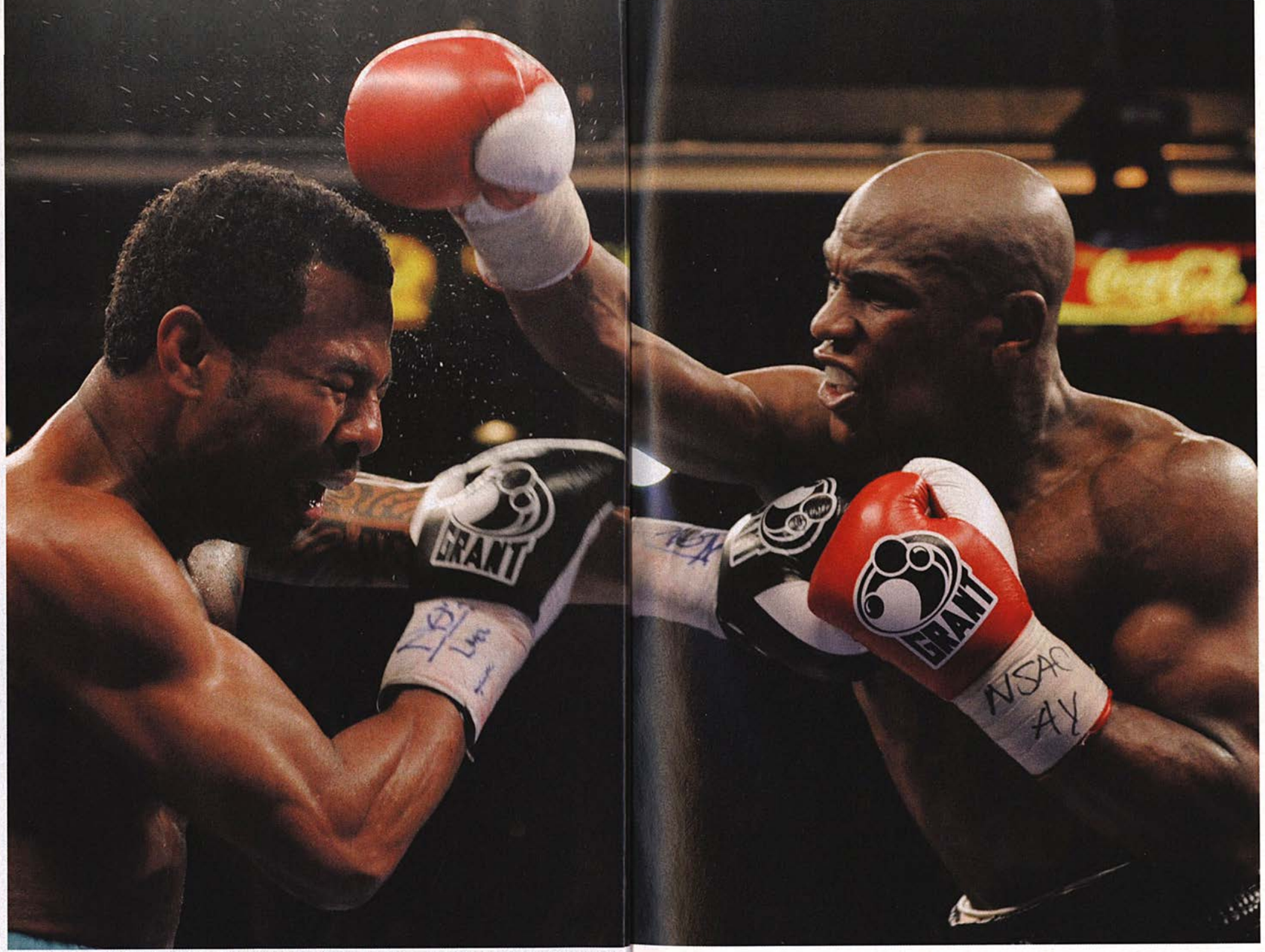
Xu was my personal choice as the "breakout" fighter of 2019. If he continues to improve his technique, which Cuban coach Pedro Diaz almost ensures, and put on fun fights, he can become "must-see TV" and a marketable name in the 126-pound division.

There's no denying that Floyd Mayweather was the biggest attraction and moneymaker from 2010 to the present, but boxing fans and insiders continue to debate if he's the Fighter of the Decade.

MONEY SPLIT

FLOYD MAYWEATHER'S FIGHTER OF THE DECADE WIN REVIVED THE STILL-FIERY FEUD BETWEEN HIS CRITICS AND SUPPORTERS

By **Tom Gray**



If you question Mayweather's heart, just re-watch Round 2 of his 2010 showdown with Shane Mosley.

During the late 1990s, Floyd Mayweather Jr. slaughtered the field at junior lightweight from prospect level to world level. The only thing faster than his feet were his fists, and terrific fighters like two-time world titleholder Genaro Hernandez and hard-hitting contender Angel Manfredy were swatted aside effortlessly. By the age of 21, the Grand Rapids star had established himself as one of the most exciting fighters in boxing and broken into The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

Then things changed.

Mayweather evolved into a global superstar, but as a prizefighter he became known for being safety-first. When he returned from 21 months of inactivity in 2009, he was a five-weight world champion with a record of 39-0 (25 knockouts). However, opinions varied on Mayweather's entertainment value. The great Manny Pacquiao buried him in terms of fan affection and, due largely to the aforementioned sabbatical, replaced him as the No. 1 fighter in the world. Mayweather wasn't happy, as evidenced by his infamous exchange with ESPN's Brian Kenny in May 2009 (this can be found on YouTube), but if he wanted to regain pound-for-pound supremacy, then he would have to earn it. And that's just what he did. Between 2010-2015, Mayweather annexed seven more world title belts (including Ring Magazine championships at 147 and 154 pounds) and scored dominant wins over Hall of Fame opposition – Pacquiao included.

In recognition of his incredible accomplishments, Mayweather, who retired in 2017 with a record of 50-0 (27 KOs), was awarded Fighter of the Decade honors by the prestigious Boxing Writers Association of America in January. He certainly had the credentials, but many fans were outraged for a multitude of reasons. Mayweather wasn't a real fighter. Mayweather was too defensive. Mayweather wasn't active enough. Mayweather cherry-picked the opposition. Is there truth to any of this? Let's explore the facts.

In May 2010, Mayweather faced off against former three-weight world titleholder Sugar Shane Mosley. This fight had been talked about for years, going back to when both men were hovering on and around the lightweight limit. Mosley was coming off a brilliant stoppage victory over Antonio Margarito that saw him claim the WBA welterweight title, but he was now 38 years old and had been inactive for 16 months. However, despite his advancing years, Mosley would come within a whisker of a spectacular knockout triumph in Round 2 when he landed two thunderous right hands. For the first time in his career, Mayweather was in the midst of a real crisis (he'd been buzzed by DeMarcus Corley six years earlier, but not like this), and his fighting heart would be seriously tested. He passed that test with flying colors.

"You have to give credit to Floyd, because he did a great job," said Mosley, who dropped a lopsided 12-round decision. "He almost got knocked out but was cognizant enough to hold, get out the way and come back like a champion to win the fight.

"I'm also very honored that people pick out the big right hands I landed, because nobody else does that. But I give Floyd the utmost respect for surviving, because I'd knocked out Margarito and Fernando Vargas, who was a much bigger fighter. That says something about Floyd; he's got a pretty good chin, he showed that he's a true champion and he's one of the greats."

But while Mosley failed to capitalize on his moment, Argentine slugger Marcos Maidana had plenty of success in a 2013 welterweight unification clash that was in fact dubbed "The Moment." In this fight, Mayweather was denied the time and distance he regularly enjoyed and spent long periods countering off the ropes and trading. Maidana couldn't match Mayweather for talent in his wildest dreams, but what the native of Santa Fe Province lacked in skill, he more than made up for in terms of heart, intensity, power and guts.

Six months prior to facing Mayweather, Maidana had thrashed Adrien Broner to claim the WBA welterweight title against the odds. Broner, something of a poor man's Mayweather, rapped his way to the ring that night in sparkling attire and the smile never left his face. Ridiculously overconfident, the Cincinnati star talked smack before the opening bell and even found time to perform some grinding action on Maidana early in the fight. Just over half an hour later, Broner exited the ring as a unanimous decision loser, having been dropped twice and battered from pillar to post.

"Maidana is different to most other fighters," said acclaimed trainer Robert Garcia, who coached "El Chino" for the Broner and Mayweather bouts. "Maidana is one of those guys who's very rough; he doesn't care if he gets hit and it's pretty much like a street fight. He makes it a dirty, ugly fight – does what it takes to win – and Mayweather doesn't like that style.

"Maidana's style will give anybody problems, no matter who it is. He did it with Broner first, then with Mayweather, and those fights were pretty similar. We had a great game plan and Maidana followed instructions. I think we did enough to pull off a close fight, but it obviously didn't go our way. Then again, it was like a win for us because we got the rematch."

Prior to Maidana, Mayweather had only taken part in one rematch in his professional career. In April 2002, Jose Luis Castillo was

Mayweather has beaten his share of future Hall of Famers – chief among them, Manny Pacquiao.

deemed unlucky not to retain his WBC lightweight title on points, and the sting of fan and media criticism forced Mayweather to grant him a return bout. Second time around, Mayweather boxed to his strengths, dominating from the outside and winning with room to spare. The mark of a truly great fighter is his ability to adapt and adjust when adversity comes calling. Like Castillo before him, Maidana was comfortably outboxed in the rematch and, despite stunning Mayweather with a right hand counter at the end of Round 3, he didn't come close to having the same success.

But despite turning back the challenge of Maidana in dominant fashion, a lot of fans lambasted the style that Mayweather fought in for both that fight and others during the decade. His famed defense and foot movement, which he utilized more often in the second half of his career, could suck the drama and excitement out of multimillion dollar events that were marketed as superfights. This is another popular reason for fans to dismiss Mayweather as Fighter of the Decade.

"The younger Floyd would take more chances; he would fight harder and the fights would be a little more exciting," said Garcia, who held the IBF junior lightweight title at the same time that Mayweather was defending the WBC version. "Toward the end of his career, when he became 'Money' Mayweather, he was very defensive. I'm sure I saw an interview where he said, 'I only need to win seven (of 12) rounds and the fight's mine.' He did just enough to win – very defensive, never took punishment, never took any risks, and that's smart.

"Look at him now; he's healthy, he's enjoying life and doing great with all the money that he's made. He's a businessman, and he didn't want to end his career with all the money in the world but not being able to enjoy it. He's got kids and he's enjoying life. I think that's the reason he was very cautious, very careful in his fights. A lot of fighters become world champions and make a lot of money, but at the end of their careers they have a hard time talking because of the punishment they took, and they have a hard time with their balance. I think Mayweather was very smart with his career."

Garcia is right, of course. As Mayweather made his way through the weights, he slowly began to simplify his fighting style. By the time he reached welterweight, the machine gun rapidity of Mayweather's fists was mostly replaced by sniper fire and stealth. No longer would he employ the flashy combination work that had brutalized Arturo Gatti in their 140-pound encounter in June 2005. Instead, Mayweather regularly focused on interrupting an opponent's advance with single shots before drifting off at angles. It was a similar approach to the one Bernard Hopkins adopted when he reached his 40s, and it required an incredible amount of ring craft. And if an opponent was lucky enough to get Mayweather anywhere near the ropes, then, for the most part, the savvy veteran's sophisticated defense rendered their assaults ineffective – ask Pacquiao or Miguel Cotto.

Another reason for fan disapproval is inactivity, because Mayweather only took part in 10 fights (nine if we remove the Conor McGregor debacle) between 2010 and 2017. Those are anemic numbers compared to the likes of Roman Gonzalez (26 fights), Canelo Alvarez (25) and even Pacquiao (16). However, if we take a look at the Fighter of the Decade list compiled by esteemed author and boxing historian Thomas Hauser (see page 40), you will notice that Sugar Ray Leonard is listed as fighter of the 1980s. In that decade, Leonard fought just 11 times and at one point went five full years with only one bout. Point that out to a Mayweather detractor and they'll handle the objection by saying Leonard fought three Hall of Famers (Roberto Duran, Thomas Hearns and Marvelous Marvin Hagler) across six fights, whereas Mayweather cherry-picked all his big name opponents. Don't get me started! I'm the biggest Leonard fan going, but despite him being my personal choice as fighter of the '80s, he could work his magic at the negotiating table as well as anyone in boxing history. Mayweather defeated Mosley, Cotto, Alvarez and Pacquiao, four future Hall of Famers, and that is an astonishing run.

"I believe that Floyd is the fighter of the decade," offered Mosley. "He's beaten all the fighters he's beaten and he's just a great fighter. He may have been inactive, but he was still in the ring with those guys. You're talking about some very tough guys, and wins over them make him the fighter of the decade. He has to be; there's no other way around it.

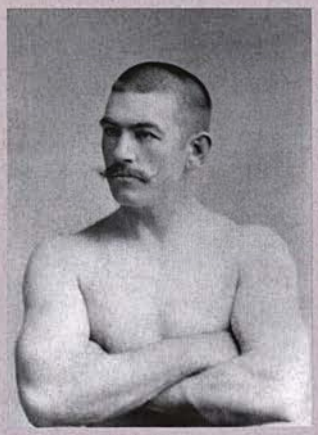
"The fear of losing made him work so hard, and he's a true competitor. He wants to win at all costs, and that makes him extremely tough to beat. As well as that, he does everything right in the ring. The jabs, the right hands, the uppercuts, the parries, the slips; he works hard every single day to be the best he can be. His punching power was also a little better than I'd expected, and he was very sharp. He has the punch to knock you out, but he would rather stick with technique and movement and let you run into punches, like when he knocked out (Ricky) Hatton. You can't just walk through Floyd; you're going to feel his shots. I take my hat off to him. He's a great warrior and a great fighter."

A day or so after speaking to Mosley about Mayweather and his own Hall of Fame career, I noticed that he'd switched stance on his fighter of the decade. The former champion has since told The Ring's Cynthia Conte and BoxingScene's Manouk Akopyan that he believes

TY IMAGES;MOSLEY: CASS

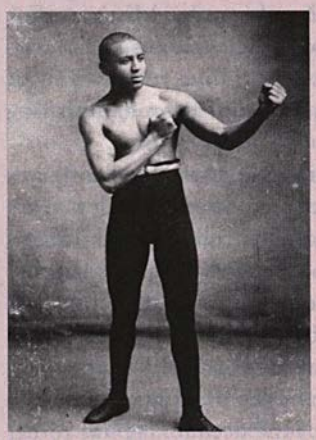
10-YEAR TENURES

AUTHOR **THOMAS HAUSER'S** PICKS FOR THE FIGHTERS WHO DEFINED THE MODERN ERA OF BOXING, DECADE BY DECADE.



1880s - John L. Sullivan

1890s - Bob Fitzsimmons



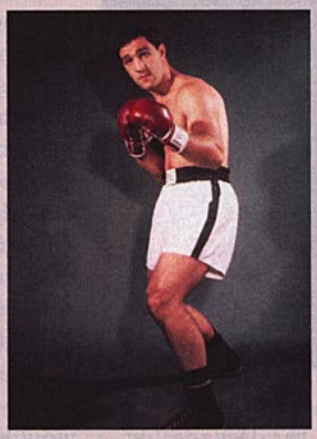
1900s - Joe Gans

1910s - Jack Johnson

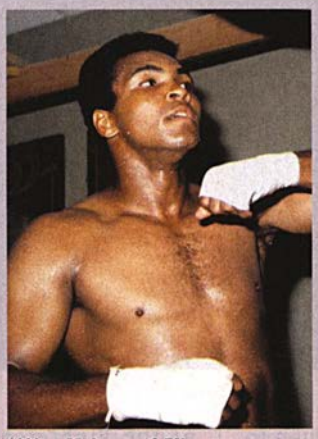
1920s - Jack Dempsey/Gene Tunney

1930s - Joe Louis

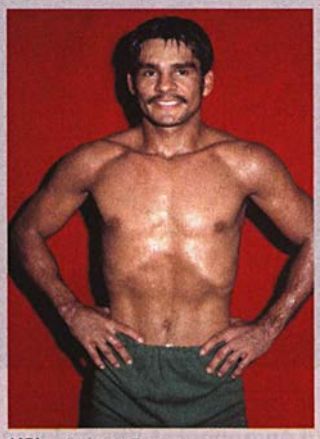
1940s - Sugar Ray Robinson



1950s - Rocky Marciano

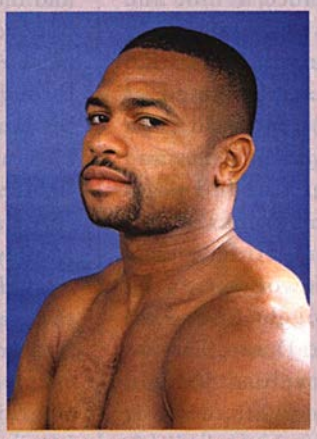


1960s - Muhammad Ali



1970s - Roberto Duran

1980s - Sugar Ray Leonard



1990s - Roy Jones Jr.

2000s - Manny Pacquiao

2010s - Canelo Alvarez

Even those who hate Mayweather admit he's worthy of the Fighter of the Decade honor.

Alvarez deserved the accolade. This turnaround might go a long way toward explaining how laborious it is to pick one winner. My own personal pick is (Vasiliy) Lomachenko, Garcia went with Pacquiao and other boxing people who I respect enormously have tabbed Andre Ward and Gonzalez over the past several weeks.

Another man whose opinion I respect also believed Alvarez should have been a lock for Fighter of the Decade. "Canelo had 23 wins, one loss, one draw, and while he scored victories over an aging Cotto and an old Mosley, he was always willing to go in tough," said Hauser. "His competitive spirit led him to challenge Mayweather too soon, but he fought and beat Austin Trout and Erislandy Lara when most fighters were avoiding them. He fought (Gennadiy) Golovkin twice, and I know there was a lot of controversy over the first decision, but he beat him the second time. And he closed out the decade with a clear victory over Danny Jacobs and an impressive knockout of Sergey Kovalev. That's more than anyone else in the decade accomplished.

"We all understand that Floyd clearly beat Canelo, but we have this illness in boxing today where so much premium is put on being an undefeated fighter. It's nonsense. Of all the fighters listed (in Hauser's Fighter of the Decade list), all but three of them lost fights during that decade – (John L.) Sullivan was undefeated in the 1880s, (Rocky) Marciano was undefeated throughout his entire career and (Muhammad) Ali was undefeated in the '60s. I don't think a loss should disqualify a fighter from being Fighter of the Decade."

The other undeniable fact in all of this is that Mayweather is such a polarizing figure. You either love him or you hate him. You either watched his fights because you admired his skills or you literally prayed for his downfall. If you're a hater, you cringed when he said he was better than Muhammad Ali and Sugar Ray Robinson, and that hate was probably compounded when he danced rings around Manny Pacquiao in the richest prizefight ever. Mayweather was smug, brash, boastful, but what did he ever brag about that he couldn't back up?

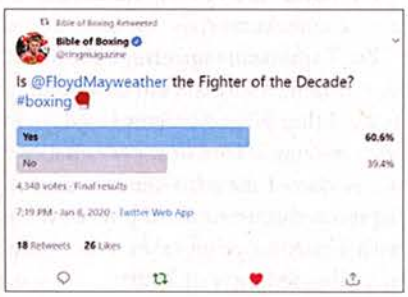
"There are people who like Floyd and give him extra credit for his personality and there are people that are turned off by his personality," acknowledged Hauser. "But if you're objective about this, you look at what a man does between the ropes. That's how you judge a fighter. In terms of what a fighter does in the ring, you judge Mike Tyson by the same standards as you would Joe Louis. It's what a fighter does inside the ring that counts.

"Now, you can take his outside the ring conduct to determine whether he's a plus or a minus for boxing, whether you like him or not. But let's take it down to its rudiments: If you're judging a fight and you have that responsibility, whether or not you like the fighter shouldn't matter. That's not what you're there for."

There are a handful of great fighters that can justifiably be labeled Fighter of the Decade, but anyone who voted for Mayweather has one very strong argument.

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

Boxing fans weighed in:



THE STANDARD-BEARER

SHOWTIME BOSS **STEPHEN ESPINOZA** GIVES THE LAY OF THE LAND AND HIS PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF TELEVISED BOXING

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

Boxing on TV has undergone a metamorphosis in recent years. ESPN expanded its role from a bit player to a major player. New streaming network DAZN made a huge splash in corralling boxing's No. 1 fighter, Canelo Alvarez, and Fox Sports made a huge commitment to further expand the role it established in 2018.

Watching by the wayside is now the old stalwart – Showtime. It wasn't that long ago that the cable-subscription network played the little brother to HBO. But with HBO dropping boxing in 2018 after 45 years in the sport, Showtime and its president of sports and event programming, Stephen Espinoza, find themselves the grizzled veteran on the TV boxing block.

Espinoza, who's in his ninth year with Showtime, has done wonders in the time he's been there. He made Floyd Mayweather the face of boxing, signing him to a multi-year, six-fight deal worth hundreds of millions, and he supervised three of the highest-profile fights – and highest grossing – in boxing history: Mayweather-Alvarez (2013), Mayweather-Manny Pacquiao (2015) and Mayweather-Conor McGregor (2017).

"I think one of the things that makes Stephen different from other TV executives in the sport is that not only does he know boxing, he loves boxing," said Steve Farhood, Showtime's Hall of Fame announcer. "I've known Stephen since he came on board at Showtime in 2011. He's a great leader."

No one in the boxing industry would contest that.

But Espinoza is uncertain about how boxing evolves from this point, as are other TV executives faced with moving it forward, presumably. It was one of the many juicy topics Espinoza discussed in an interview with The Ring prior to the network's first televised fight of 2020.

THE RING: How did you feel about 2019?

STEPHEN ESPINOZA: To be candid, 2019 was a strange year. Maybe that was foreseeable or should have been foreseeable coming into the year with all of the change going on. We had HBO getting out of the business and a couple of new entrants coming in, with ESPN expanding to a different level.

I think everybody was sort of finding their way, week by week, month by month. I think, to be completely candid, the product across the board reflected that. It was really inconsistent. You can look at every platform and say some had great fights and some had not-so-great fights. I think that's a result of uncertainty.

Not knowing strategies, not knowing the players and where they're going is the reason. I think with certainty and a little more familiarity, I think everyone is going to have a better year. That's good news for the fans and for the sport in 2020.

RING: How would you rate Showtime's 2019?

SE: I think we suffered because we were coming off arguably our two strongest years in 2017 and 2018. It was almost inevitable that we weren't going to be able to continue that run forever, as much as we would have liked to.

Then you add in the uncertainty. There are some fights that didn't come together at all. There were some fights that came together differently than we expected them to. There is a lot of competition and not a lot of rationality in the marketplace. There are a lot of deals being made which don't really correspond to viewership, to demand in the market, and just a lot of money being thrown around.

I'm the last person who would begrudge fighters getting paid. I think that's a great thing. But in terms of the certainty in the marketplace and being able to plan ahead a month or two, it causes chaos.

RING: What do you project for 2020?

SE: I think we're already seeing, at least in respect to the Showtime programming, that it is stabilizing and getting to a more consistent level of quality.

I think you could see a timeline starting with December 7 (2019). We had the Jermall Charlo fight, with a really good co-feature with Chris Eubank Jr. and Matt Korobov. For reasons that we didn't have anything to do with, the Eubank-Korobov fight didn't come out the way everyone had hoped (because Korobov suffered a shoulder injury in the second round).

Then you go to December 28.

Showtime kicked off 2020 with 160-pound titleholder Jermall Charlo headlining Championship Boxing.

(Gervonta) Tank Davis is Tank Davis, who is really maturing into a star. That had a really good co-feature with Jean Pascal and Badou Jack, and there was no way that wasn't going to be a good fight.

Then we started January 25, and we had Danny Garcia (and) Jarrett Hurd (in separate fights), and then there is Stephen Fulton, who has looked really good.

RING: Now you guys are the old dog on the block. You find yourself the standard that everyone else measures themselves against.

SE: That's a really insightful comment. We are the established incumbent. We are currently the longest-running boxing program in the sport. We're the establishment, and with that comes higher expectations, which are absolutely true. That should be the case, and with that we're going to be attracting the bulk of the fire. That's fine. We are a target. The key is that we need to continue setting the standard on the production level, and that means all levels. It means the announcers, with the production value, but also how we organize, deliver and promote the sport.

That's one of the negative consequences of the rapid expansion of content. It's a lot of fights. For the hardcore fan, it's great. But I'm on record saying it's not a good thing. There are a lot of fights happening where there doesn't seem to be a standard of quality. There's someone saying, "Sure, you want to put on a fight, we'll put it on our air." I don't think it's good for the sport or good for the audience. I wonder, with this greater level of activity, are we putting a strain on our pool of boxers in terms of safety issues? Using guys more frequently puts them under greater stress.

There's no secret that 2019 was a terrible year, and the worst year in recent memory in terms of fighter injuries and deaths in the ring. No one wants to see a repeat of that. I think the amount of boxing and demand for opponents plays into that.

I also think that when you're launching new streaming services, you need hours, you need content, you need filler, and you end up putting on a fight at 4 in the morning from Tokyo, and here's some Irish ShoBox-level fighters to watch.

Yes, the hardcore fans like that. But does it refine and grow the boxing audience? I don't think it does.

RING: Showtime does have a step up in production over the other boxing TV platforms. Showtime has Hall of Famers like Steve Farhood, Jim Gray, Al Bernstein and Barry Tompkins. How much easier does that make your job?

SE: The Lakers way back fielded a team of All-Stars, but they were a bunch of names. No chemistry. We have chemistry. Mauro Ranallo and Paulie Malignaggi working with Al, there is a balance of energy there. We have a really good team.

RING: What are you looking forward to in 2020?

SE: One of the things that I'm encouraged by is seeing the emergence of a guy like Gervonta Davis. We certainly don't like losing "stars," like Floyd Mayweather retires or Canelo Alvarez decides to go somewhere else or when Deontay Wilder takes a couple of fights on Fox. What is reassuring is that the beat goes on. It continues. We have demonstrated the ability to establish and develop stars. It's one of the knocks we took when I first started. We weren't known for developing careers and breaking stars. We don't hear that anymore.

RING: I think what helps Showtime is that you have boxing people who are broadcasters, and they have a keen eye for talent.

SE: There's a history there. Some of our marketing people have marketed the Mike Tysons, Evander Holyfields, Julio Cesar Chavez through Diego Corrales and the Corrales-Jose Luis Castillo fight, to Floyd Mayweather to today. There is institutional knowledge that is second to none.

When all of those other services go looking for young employees, they poach ours. That's an established fact. It's a pain in my ass, but it's also the highest compliment. That's because we not only develop boxing talent, we develop employees who know the sport and care about the sport as well.

RING: How frustrating is that, and how do you deal with it? Because Showtime also built Deontay Wilder, who you now share with Fox.

SE: At a certain level with Fox, and let's be explicit about it, they're coming into this having no recent history in the sport. The only place that they were going to get main-event fighters were fighters that we established.

One of the big questions I have is: Are they going to be able to develop stars of their own? I think that's critical to the health of the sport overall. Not to just take guys we develop, but to take someone from an FS1 card and develop them into a headliner all of the way to pay-per-view. If they can do that, it's great for the sport.

In the meantime, yes, it is frustrating. But I understand. If someone is out there throwing around what we consider foolish money, and there are multiple parties doing that, it's money that is going to result in losses of 10, 15 million. It's tough to say that loyalty means you don't take silly money sometimes.

The reason why you haven't seen a large defection to DAZN is because, among other things, people know the visibility of their events, and their career drops significantly once they move to DAZN. That's why all money isn't good money. It might make sense to go there and take a big check. Other fighters can't afford to disappear for a year or 18 months, even if they're going to make a few million.

We're going to win our share of those battles to retain and attract the stars based on our track record, which is making the biggest events literally in the history of the sport. Fighters are going to come and go, but we're continuing to develop new stars, which is great for the sport and great for the network.

RING: How stable is Showtime's footing?

SE: To be completely candid, it's more stable than virtually every other platform that's out there today. That's partially because of our history. That's partially because of our senior executives' commitment to the sport. And most of all because the sport still drives business for us.

We're not completely open with all of the factors that go into that decision, but coming off an event like Tank's fight in December, which can be measured in any different number of ways – from viewership to digital streaming to social media to more intangibles – suffice to say an event like that drives business. The day in which big events like that do not make a splash, then we're going to have trouble justifying staying in the sport.

That's not at all where we are. And it's where we're trending. So, this narrative about we're approaching the end of our time, I have zero concern about that. Anyone who knows me, if I had some concerns, I wouldn't sit here and lie to you about it.

Right now, there is a firm commitment to the sport. We're now part of Viacom, which already has its commitment to combat sports with (MMA company) Bellator, and there are a lot of synergies there in terms of cross-promotion and marketing. There's an appreciation for live sports and live combat sports.

When I look at other platforms, I see we are in this sport as an end to itself. This is not a stepping-stone. This is a proof of concept for us. This is not an experiment to replace some other programming that we lost. Our viewership is what it is, and we don't cover it up by coming up with some worldwide viewership numbers like 10 million hours of viewership. What does that mean? It's nothing. It's a number devoid of context to answer questions about why you don't give your viewership (statistics).

RING: What fallacies do you believe are out there?

SE: I think there is a lot of misconception about viewership and the relative value of viewership. We don't monetize viewership. Certainly viewership is important, because it shows people are interested in what we put on the air. But unlike Fox or ESPN, we're not dependent on it for revenues. I think viewership is great for exposure, but can they develop those numbers into stars? OK, it might be phenomenal marketing, but has it moved the needle in terms of pay-per-view? I haven't seen it. I would love to be doing two million viewers on our shows. But I'm happy we're doing, generally speaking, what is equivalent viewership to what ESPN is doing, with one-third of the homes. All of us, no matter what the platform, are doing significantly more than DAZN.

I don't know how we got into this world of needing to criticize everyone else's platform in order to promote your own, and it's a chicken-and-the-egg thing. Once a couple of guys do it, I have to answer, and it turns into an endless cycle. When CBS has a great NFL game, nobody from Fox or ESPN tries to tear them down and point out holes in the ratings. What is good for the sport on one network is good for the sport overall.

I'm not rooting for the failure of any of these platforms. What I'm rooting for is a rational, positive, long-term commitment to elevating the sport from all of them. If that is the case, we're all better off, and there's plenty of good content for everyone to go around.

RING: What I feel is one of the most underrated boxing programs is Showtime's ShoBox. All it does is keep boxing at the grassroots level where it needs to grow.

SE: I couldn't agree more. ShoBox is the strongest brand in the sport of boxing today. There isn't another platform or series that boxing fans know exactly what they're going to get, day in and day out. If you're paying attention, you know what you're going to see when you watch ShoBox. It's prospects in crossroads fights, and sometimes those prospects lose.

Showtime has big plans for 135-pound attraction Gervonta Davis, pictured with Baltimore mayor Bernard Young at a fan rally last June.

I give all of the credit in the world to Gordon Hall and his team. Gordon is beyond diligent in making sure these are tough matchups. This is a series that has consistently identified and developed future superstars, and there isn't anyone else in the sport that has made the commitment to make that work. It's not always sexy. None of it is easy. I mean, we're talking about going to places like Shelton, Washington, or Sloan, Iowa – it's a haul to get there. But everyone who works on that series has a commitment to that series, and they have a belief in what that series does. There's nothing else like it in the sport.

RING: Talk about your evolution.

SE: It seems like a million years ago that I started. There are honestly things I could have never predicted, like breaking the pay-per-view record. To be consistently delivering the highest quality of boxing, it's a blessing to have the commitment of the corporation, and it's not as simple as "make the best fights and throw them on the screen."

RING: Any dream fights for 2020?

SE: I'll break this down by categories. I would like to see a signature fight for Gervonta Davis. We've done some successful events with him, and everyone wants to see how high the ceiling is with him. How good is he? They want to see him get tested. Just like a few years back, when Wilder fought Luis Ortiz. Let's see what we have.

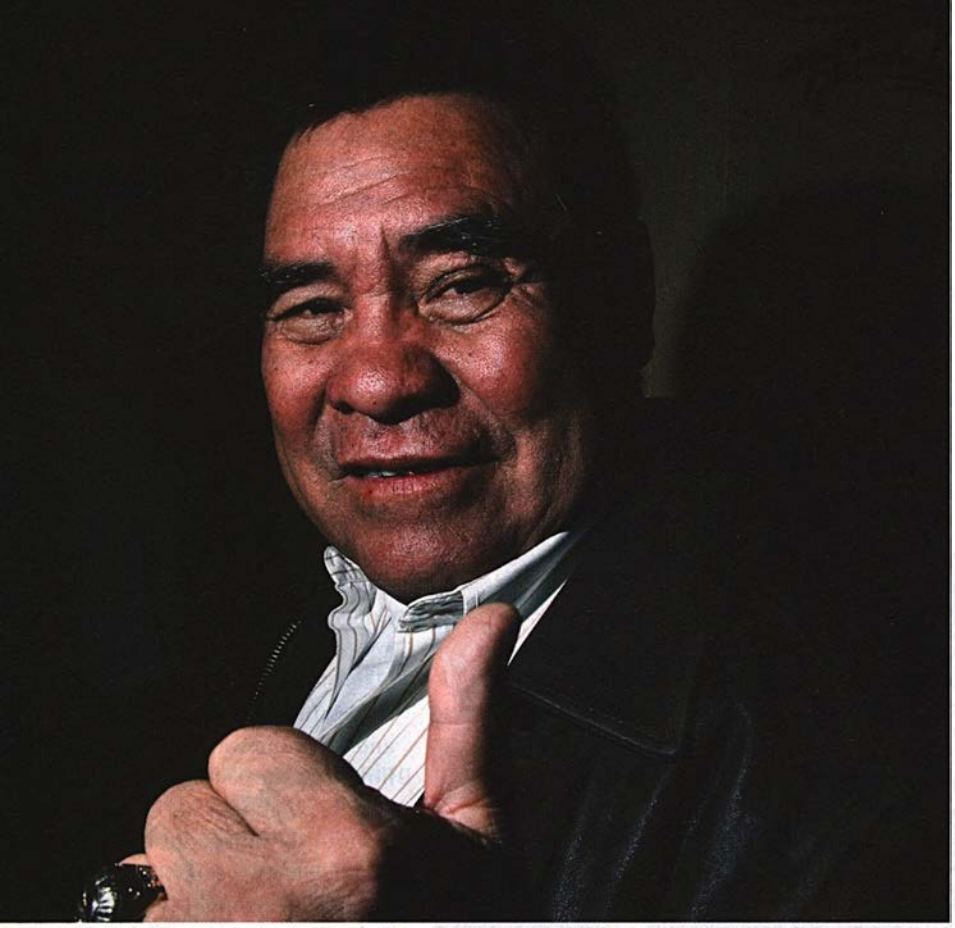
I've been saying this for a few years, but I would like to see unification at 154. We won't get all of it, but we'll have a significant piece of it. I'd also like to see it at 160. I also recognize the value of having one champion in some divisions. I think we can see that in 2020.

RING: So, boxing isn't dead at Showtime?

SE: No, I wouldn't be selling Showtime boxing stock right now. We're excited about where we're going. There's always competition and there are always challenges. But I like that. I didn't give up my law practice and move to New York to not compete at the highest level. I would rather fail spectacularly than not try.

In these next few years, we're either going to be a great success or a spectacular car crash, flameout ending. I'm fine with either. I prefer one over the other, but what the car crash, flameout ending would mean is we aimed high and we fell short.

So far, I think we're on the right track.



Ruben Olivares is regarded as one of the greatest Mexican fighters of all time.

GREATEST HITS: RUBEN OLIVARES

THROUGHOUT THE GOLDEN YEARS OF THE SEVENTIES, THE FORMER TWO-WEIGHT CHAMP POUNDED HIS WAY INTO THE PANTHEON OF MEXICO'S MOST REVERED FIGHTERS

By **Anson Wainwright**

Ruben Olivares was born in Mexico City on January 14, 1947, and grew up in the tough environment of the capital's Colonia Bondojito neighborhood. He took up boxing when he was 15 and earned his stripes in the amateurs before turning professional in early 1965.

The big-punching flyweight stretched his first 24 opponents and made his way through the ranks while his body matured into the bantamweight division. Olivares' fearsome reputation grew along with his propensity to land his vaunted left hook to the liver. He knocked out former champion Salvatore Burruni (TKO 3), future world title challenger Kazuyoshi Kanazawa (TKO 2) and former world title challenger Takao Sakurai (TKO 6) in an eliminator to secure a matchup against Lionel Rose in August 1969 at the Fabulous Forum in Inglewood, California.

By this time, "Rockabye Ruben," already an attraction in Mexico and Southern California, had run his record to an incredible 52-0-1 with 50 knockouts. Rose was dispatched with considerable ease, dropped in the second round and twice in the fifth.

Olivares made two defenses of his undisputed crown at his home away from home, The Forum, against British champion Alan Rudkin and compatriot Chucho Castillo before yielding the title to Castillo in their rematch. He regained his belts in their third fight.

He made two defenses before losing to Rafael Herrera in August 1972.

"El Puas" decided to move up in weight. His party-going ways always threatened to blight his career, but twice he won versions of the featherweight title. Olivares' first 126-pound reign ended against a young Alexis Arguello, who scored a dramatic 13th-round stoppage in November 1974, but he rebounded seven months later against Los Angeles-area star Bobby Chacon, whom he stopped in two rounds to earn the WBC featherweight title. Olivares had handed Chacon his first pro defeat, by ninth-round stoppage in 1973, but lost their third match by 10-round decision in 1977 when he was clearly on the decline.

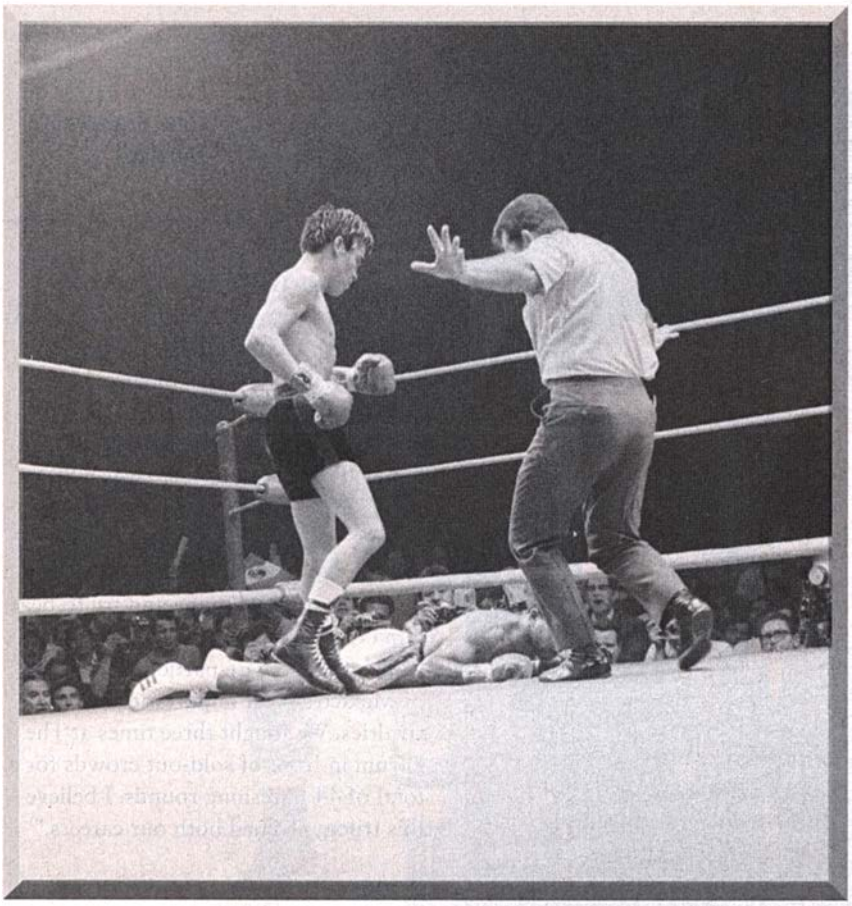
Although Olivares' record became patchy during the final years of his career, he was still a dangerous opponent – as future two-time lightweight titleholder Jose Luis Ramirez, whom he stopped in two rounds in 1978, will attest.

His last big fight was against WBA 126-pound beltholder Eusebio Pedroza, who stopped him in 12 rounds in July 1979. He stuck around until the fall of 1981, and although he made two ill-conceived comebacks later in the decade, his place in Mexican folklore was secure.

Olivares (89-13-3, 79 KOs) entered the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1991.

Now 72, the great former champion lives in Mexico City. He is married and has six children. He is still popular in his homeland.

Here, Olivares looks back on six career-defining victories.



LIONEL ROSE

August 22, 1969, The Forum, Inglewood, California • Titles: WBA/ WBC bantamweight

"My trainer, 'Chilero' Carrillo, had me in tip-top shape for this fight. These days, there are some guys who become world champion after 10 or so fights. Well, here I was with 53 fights going into my first bout for the title. It was much harder back then to become world champion because there were only two organizations – the WBC and the WBA – and much fewer divisions. It was the most memorable and exciting time of my boxing career. I was thrilled beyond belief to become world champion at The Forum in Inglewood, in front of a sold-out crowd, plus winning by fifth-round knockout. Last year was the 50th anniversary of my win over Rose for the world bantamweight championship."

RESULT: OLIVARES KO 5

CHUCHO CASTILLO

April 18, 1970, The Forum, Inglewood, California • Titles: WBA/ WBC bantamweight

"I was as surprised as everyone else when Castillo dropped me in the third. It was a tough round for me, but thank God my physical condition got me through. I got up and beat him by 15-round unanimous decision, also in front of a sold-out crowd at The Forum. There was so much interest in this fight that it was shown at closed-circuit auditoriums throughout Southern California. It was definitely a fierce rivalry that we had. We were not the best of friends. We were completely different people. I remember telling the press after this fight, 'I don't like Chucho, but he's not a bad little boxer.' He was the quiet type, serious and dedicated. And also in great athletic shape."

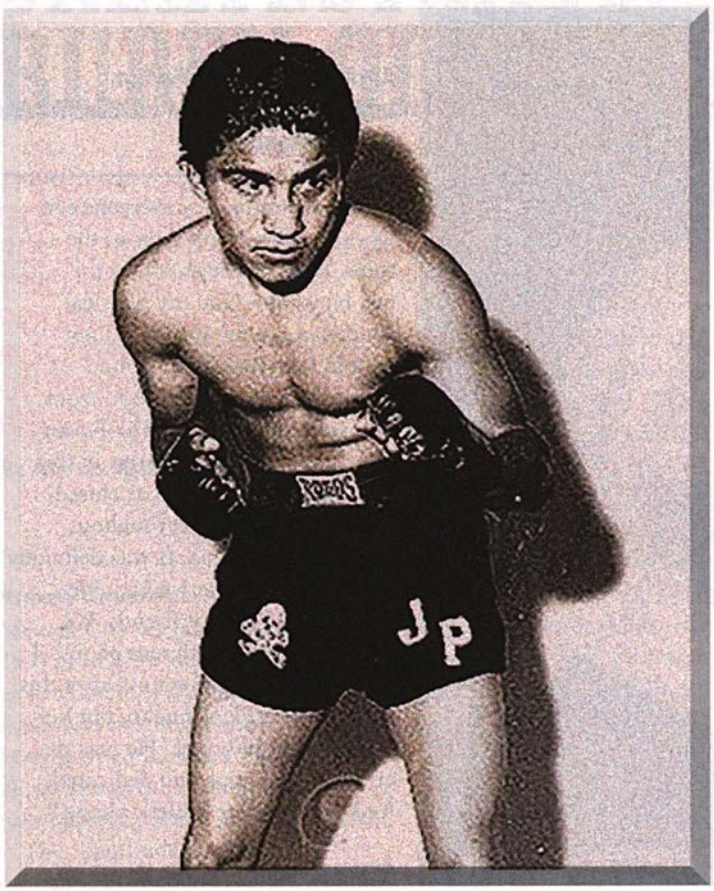
RESULT: OLIVARES UD 15

CHUCHO CASTILLO III

April 2, 1971, The Forum, Inglewood, California • Titles: WBA/WBC bantamweight

"After our first fight, everyone wanted the rematch. But in our second fight, the doctor stopped it in the 14th round because of a badly cut eye, giving the fight to Castillo. It was the first loss of my career. Could Chucho have cut me because of a headbutt? Probably so. So for the third fight, revenge was a big factor. It meant everything to me to win the championship again. I did not like the feeling of not being champ. I had to be in great shape and try to beat him every round to get my titles back. Chucho and I were participants in one of Mexico's most important boxing rivalries. We fought three times at The Forum in front of sold-out crowds for a total of 44 punishing rounds. I believe this trilogy defined both our careers."

RESULT: OLIVARES UD 15

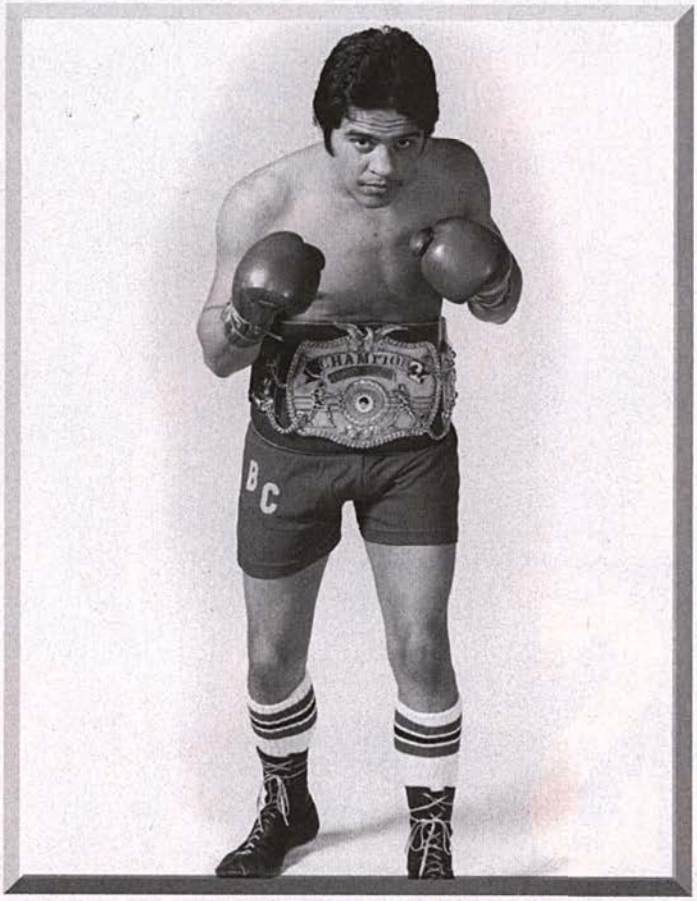


JESUS PIMENTEL

December 14, 1971, The Forum, Inglewood, California • Titles: WBA/WBC bantamweight

"Jesus 'Little Poison' Pimentel was one tough hombre. Boxing writers say he was the best bantamweight that never won a world title. We fought for my bantamweight titles at The Forum in 1971, but I was able to stop him in the 11th round. Interestingly enough, this was his one and only attempt at the title, then he retired from the ring that night. (Promoter George) Parnassus offered me a new car to motivate me; he believed in me, and I did try for the KO in the fifth but did not get it. Parnassus paid me $90,000 for the Pimentel fight, so I was able to buy a new car anyway. The Forum was like my second home. The Los Angeles area means a lot to me because I won all four of my world titles at The Forum. I fought there a total of 22 times. I don't think any other boxer is near that number. My representative, Gene Aguilera, tells me that he can't believe The Forum doesn't have a plaque mounted on their wall that celebrates that fact."

RESULT: OLIVARES TKO 11

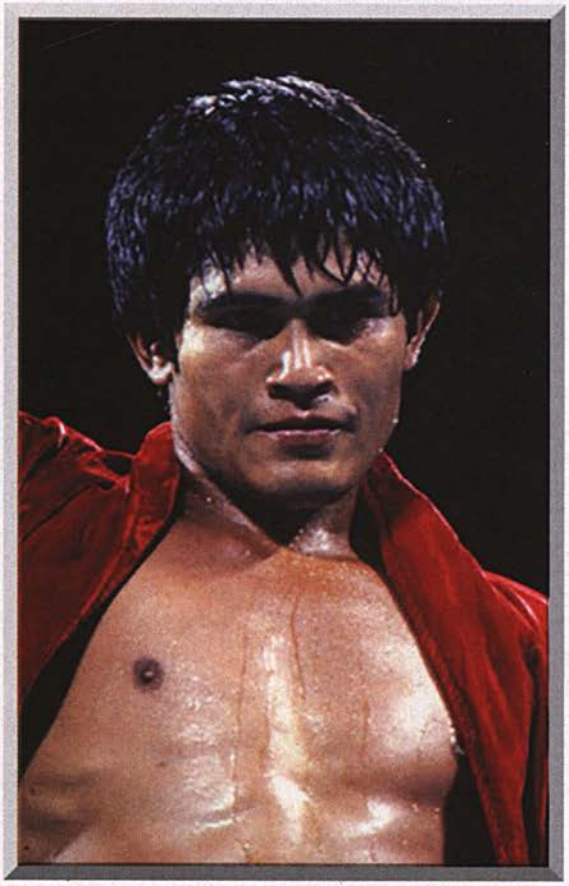


BOBBY CHACON II

June 20, 1975, Forum, Inglewood, California • Titles: WBC featherweight

"In my first fight with Bobby in 1973, I hit him with an overhand right in the ninth, and he landed about four feet away on the seat of his pants. The miracle was that he was able to get up and finish the round. His handlers wisely stopped the fight between rounds. That was Bobby's first loss as a pro. In our second fight, which was for Bobby's WBC featherweight title, I knocked him out in two rounds. We heard Bobby was having trouble making weight, so when we saw him at the weigh-in, he looked like death warmed over. During the fight, I didn't feel any strength from Bobby, no resistance, nothing. He felt weak. So I went for it, and the referee stopped the fight after the second knockdown. The second Chacon fight was a significant victory for me because I became the featherweight world champion for the second time, to go along with being a two-time bantamweight champion. In those days it was difficult to become a world champion, much less a four-time world champion. My effort and dedication made it pay off for me."

RESULT: OLIVARES TKO 2



JOSE LUIS RAMIREZ

April 28, 1978, Arena de Ciudad Obregon, Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico • Titles: None

"I was brought in as 'the opponent' for Ramirez, for him to add a name to his résumé. It was a tough fight because he was a young, up-and-coming 19-year-old with a record of 43-1, and he dropped me in the first round. But in the second, I caught him in the corner with a perfect left, and down he goes. The referee could have counted to 100. That fight was in Obregon, Sonora, Mexico, in 1978, but to this day, I have not seen a video of that fight. It is a fight that has gone underground, under the radar, like they don't want anyone to see it. I know it was televised, because I saw all the cameras. None of the great fighters he fought – Alexis Arguello, Ray Mancini, Edwin Rosario, Hector Camacho, Pernell Whitaker, Julio Cesar Chavez – were able to knock Ramirez out. I was the only one. He had quite the impressive career. Many years later, I ran into Ramirez and his son at a boxing event, and he told his son, 'This is my other Papa. The only one who ever knocked me out cold was Ruben Olivares.'"

RESULT: OLIVARES TKO 2

Gene Aguilera helped coordinate and translate this feature. The Ring appreciated his assistance. Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

THE TANK ROLLS ON

GERVONTA DAVIS HAS BECOME A PROVEN TICKET-SELLER AND AN EMERGING STAR IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MARKET, BUT IS HE READY FOR PAY-PER-VIEW?

By **Michael Montero**

It was more difficult than most expected, but Gervonta "Tank" Davis stopped Yuriorkis Gamboa in Round 12 of their December 28 lightweight bout in Atlanta. When Davis dropped the former featherweight titleholder in the second round, things appeared to be going according to script. But Gamboa made it to his feet and, despite being dropped two more times and fighting much of the bout with a ruptured right Achilles tendon, had plenty of moments. The day before, Davis showed up late for the weigh-in, came in heavy on his first attempt to the scale and started a melee with Gamboa on the stage. He made weight two hours later. Even with all the drama and distractions, however, an announced crowd of 14,129 showed up at the State

The star of the Mayweather Promotions stable, Davis captivates fans with his blend of aggression, speed and power.

Gervonta Davis struggled to put away faded former featherweight titleholder Yuriorkis Gamboa on December 28, but he put on a show for the 14,000 fans who packed the State Farm Arena in Atlanta.

Farm Arena to watch Tank make his 135-pound debut.

The fight marked the first major boxing event in Atlanta since former heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield defended his unified titles against Vaughn Bean at the old Georgia Dome in 1998. On top of being a success at the box office, over 600,000 viewers tuned in to the live Showtime Championship Boxing broadcast of Davis-Gamboa. It was the second highest-rated fight on Showtime in 2019. One thing is clear: Fans are paying attention to Tank.

"Gervonta has captivated the imagination of the younger fans," Mayweather Promotions CEO Leonard Ellerbe told The Ring. "A lot of kids look up to him; they love his fighting style. They don't care who he fights. They just want to get to his fights, see his fights and talk about his fights."

Davis is part of an emerging generation of young American fighters, along with Teofimo Lopez (15-0, 12 KOs), Devin Haney (24-0, 15 KOs), Ryan Garcia (19-0, 16 KOs) and others. One thing that currently separates him from the pack is that he's drawn large crowds while headlining shows in multiple markets. A capacity crowd of more than 8,000 turned up to watch Gervonta destroy former 122-pound titleholder Hugo Ruiz at the Dignity Health Sports Park just outside of L.A. in February 2019. He followed that up with a sellout crowd of more than 14,000 at the Royal Farms Arena in Baltimore against Panamanian journeyman Ricardo Nunez, and then the large crowd in Atlanta for Gamboa.

Ellerbe says that Davis has "the entire package" when it comes to building fans. "Tank has a great backstory. He's become a star in the sport and is quickly approaching a time where he'll take over the sport. He's a very compact, exciting fighter with a tremendous skill set. Pound for pound, skill for skill, he rates up there with the top two or three boxers in the world. The fans and media just haven't seen it yet, but Tank can box his ass off."

The pound-for-pound talk might be a tad premature, but the potential is certainly there. For starters, the power is legit. All but two of Tank's victories have been stoppages, including eight first-round knockouts and eight more coming in the second or third round. In fact, Davis has gone seven or more rounds in only four of his bouts. A southpaw, many of the knockdowns and knockouts Tank has scored have come via his explosive left hand. The left comes from all angles, whether throwing looping overhand shots from the outside, straight shots from mid-range or rear-hand uppercuts on the inside. He's displayed an advanced counterpunching ability, often crouching down to shoot counters that his opponents rarely see coming, and a developing right hand. It was a right hook that scored the knockout in Tank's best win to date against Puerto Rican Jose Pedraza in 2017. A devastating body attack got it done against Argentine Jesus Cuellar the following year. But Davis has shown defensive liabilities at times and inconsistent, limited use of his jab. According to CompuBox historical data, the average lightweight throws around 24 jabs per round, landing around 5. Davis has consistently thrown and landed the jab at around half that rate. Further, he has shown a tendency to load up on his punches and focus solely on power, something that experienced fighters like Gamboa were able to take advantage of in spots. If and when Davis steps up to face the elite, these deficiencies could cost him. Still, the explosiveness, speed and power he has shown thus far have made him a growing fan favorite.

"Gervonta is a perfect example of that 'it factor' that's hard to describe or quantify," Showtime Sports president Stephen Espinoza told The Ring. "Whether you go by crowd reaction, social media traffic or ticket sales, he is at the head of the class among the younger generation of fighters. He clearly has the most momentum when it comes to building a large fan base. It's his style inside the ring but also his vulnerability outside of it, being willing to share the struggles he's been through."

Those struggles began in the Sandtown-Winchester community in West Baltimore, where Davis is from. In a city riddled with crime, the Sandtown-Winchester section has been one of the most dangerous neighborhoods for years. His trainer, Calvin Ford, was the inspiration for the character Dennis "Cutty" Wise on HBO's The Wire. Tank beat the odds when his uncles brought him to the Upton Boxing Center at the age of 5. It was there that he would meet Ford and learn the sweet science, changing his life forever. Davis compiled an outstanding amateur record of 206-15, which included a 2012 National Golden Gloves Championship, before turning pro in 2013. He signed with Mayweather Promotions in 2015 after meeting Floyd at one of Adrien Broner's training camps. As a professional, he has built a record of 23-0 (22 KOs) and is now the star pupil of Floyd Mayweather's promotional company. There have been hiccups along the way, however, both in and out of the ring.

Davis was accused of first-degree aggravated assault by a childhood friend in the summer of 2017. The charge was later changed to misdemeanor second-degree assault and ultimately dropped in court. Earlier that year, Davis had won his first world title with a Round 7 knockout over Pedraza. In only his second defense, he would lose the IBF junior lightweight belt on the scales, failing to make weight. Around the same time, Davis was arrested for his part in a street brawl outside a Washington, D.C., night club. Witnesses claim there was an argument over the bill, which was reported as being over $10,000.

Ellerbe says the best way to keep Tank out of trouble is to keep him busy. "We're going to keep Gervonta as busy as possible, because that's what you have to do with young

fighters," he said. "We built up the richest fighter in the history of the sport (Mayweather). We know how to move our fighters and build stars."

Mayweather and Ellerbe deserve credit for developing the Gervonta Davis brand. A big part of that has been fighting in different cities with a targeted focus on the African American fan base, which was Mayweather's bread and butter. "That's why we went to Atlanta," Ellerbe said. "Everyone calls Atlanta 'Black Hollywood.' You have a great number of people there in the entertainment industry – actors, actresses, musicians. There's so much going on there. It's a heavily populated African American area. Tank loves Atlanta; he has a house there. He spends quite a bit of time there." Davis has also recently fought in Brooklyn, Las Vegas and London. "We're exposing him to different markets," Ellerbe said. "We're not only targeting the African American community. Tank has fans from all around the world. We went to the U.K. (to fight mandatory challenger Liam Walsh in 2017) and I was shocked at the amount of British fans that he had. There's no ceiling to what Tank can accomplish in this sport. We're going to go around the world. We've already received offers for him to come to Japan, China and Africa."

Davis has proven that he can sell tickets and draw attention from fans, but he has also drawn plenty of criticism. Despite all the excitement from casual fans and hyperbolic spin from his management, Tank has yet to face an elite-level fighter in their physical prime. In fact, many of his opponents were either smaller fighters who moved up in weight, faded veterans well past their best days or both. Currently, Vasiliy Lomachenko is universally recognized as the legitimate lightweight champion, with the Ring belt and three sanctioning-body titles. Teofimo Lopez, who holds the IBF lightweight belt, will likely face the Ukrainian in May to consolidate the titles. Both are with promoter Top Rank and fight exclusively on ESPN. Further, most of the other top lightweights in the world currently reside on "other sides of the street" from Davis in regards to their network ties. Despite this, it's all systems go for Tank to make his pay-per-view debut in 2020.

"We're definitely entering into the pay-per-view world," said Ellerbe. "Tank will have his first pay-per-view fight in 2020." Espinoza added, "There is definitely an interest in testing the pay-per-view waters with Gervonta. Given the type of enthusiasm he has generated at the box office with his live gates, I don't think that's a crazy idea. But it has to be a premium matchup."

Which leads to the logical question: Who?

"There is no shortage of guys calling Tank out," Espinoza said. "Everyone from Leo Santa Cruz to Gary Russell to Abner Mares to Joseph Diaz have all mentioned him as possibilities in the past. Leo has been very vocal most recently about wanting Gervonta for his next fight. I wouldn't be surprised if that's the matchup that gets made next." Ellerbe, Mayweather and Davis himself have all mentioned Santa Cruz's name in recent interviews as well.

JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA

Davis' handlers know how to develop pay-per-view fighters and events, and they predict big numbers in his future.

Although both have become reliable ticket-sellers in their home markets, a Davis vs. Santa Cruz PPV in 2020 would be a tough sell to knowledgeable fight fans. For starters, the Mexico native won his first world title at bantamweight and has fought all but one of his 39 career bouts at or under 126 pounds. After two thrilling featherweight bouts with Carl Frampton a few years ago, Santa Cruz (37-1-1, 19 KOs) has faced mostly lackluster opposition. In his 130-pound debut on the Deontay Wilder-Luis Ortiz 2 undercard last November, journeyman Miguel Flores took him the 12-round distance. It is unlikely that Davis, who just struggled to make 135 pounds against Gamboa, would want to boil back down in weight to face Santa Cruz. The most likely scenario is that Santa Cruz would move up. After ponying up $75 to watch Errol Spence shut out Mikey Garcia on Fox PPV last March, will fight fans be wary of paying for a Davis-Santa Cruz lightweight matchup?

Would Mayweather and Ellerbe be willing to put Tank in with the Lomachenko-Lopez winner? There are plenty of examples in recent history that all point to a big, fat no. Who else is there? Robert Easter (22-1-1, 14 KOs), Javier Fortuna (35-2-1, 24 KOs) and Rances Barthelemy (27-1-1, 14 KOs) are all top 10 lightweights aligned with Premier Boxing Champions, Al Haymon's platform that works hand-in-hand with Mayweather Promotions, but they are not exactly elite-level opponents. Gary Russell Jr. (30-1, 18 KOs) is a PBC fighter and quite possibly the best featherweight in the world right now, but he would have to leap up two divisions to face Davis.

Davis has certainly removed any doubts as to whether he can sell tickets, but questions remain as it relates to the PPV world. If Mayweather Promotions is going to make a push for PPV, they will have to step up the level of opposition. It is fair to point out that Tank is only 25 years old and still developing as a fighter. Likewise, it is also fair to note that the aforementioned Teofimo Lopez is only 22 years old and stepping up to fight the man that many feel is the best fighter in the world, pound-for-pound. Sometimes you just have to throw caution to the wind and put your money where your mouth is.

Here's hoping that Mayweather lives up to his "Money" moniker and puts his apprentice to the test against the best, sooner rather than later. Hopefully Tank will stay focused, out of trouble and on weight in the meantime. RING

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast 'The Neutral Corner' can be heard on iTunes, Spotify, iHeartRadio and elsewhere.

"The Takeover" was officially back on following Teofimo Lopez's impressive second-round stoppage of Richard Commey on December 14, which earned him the IBF lightweight title and set up a spring showdown with Ring champ Vasiliy Lomachenko.

(STILL) THE NEXT BIG THING

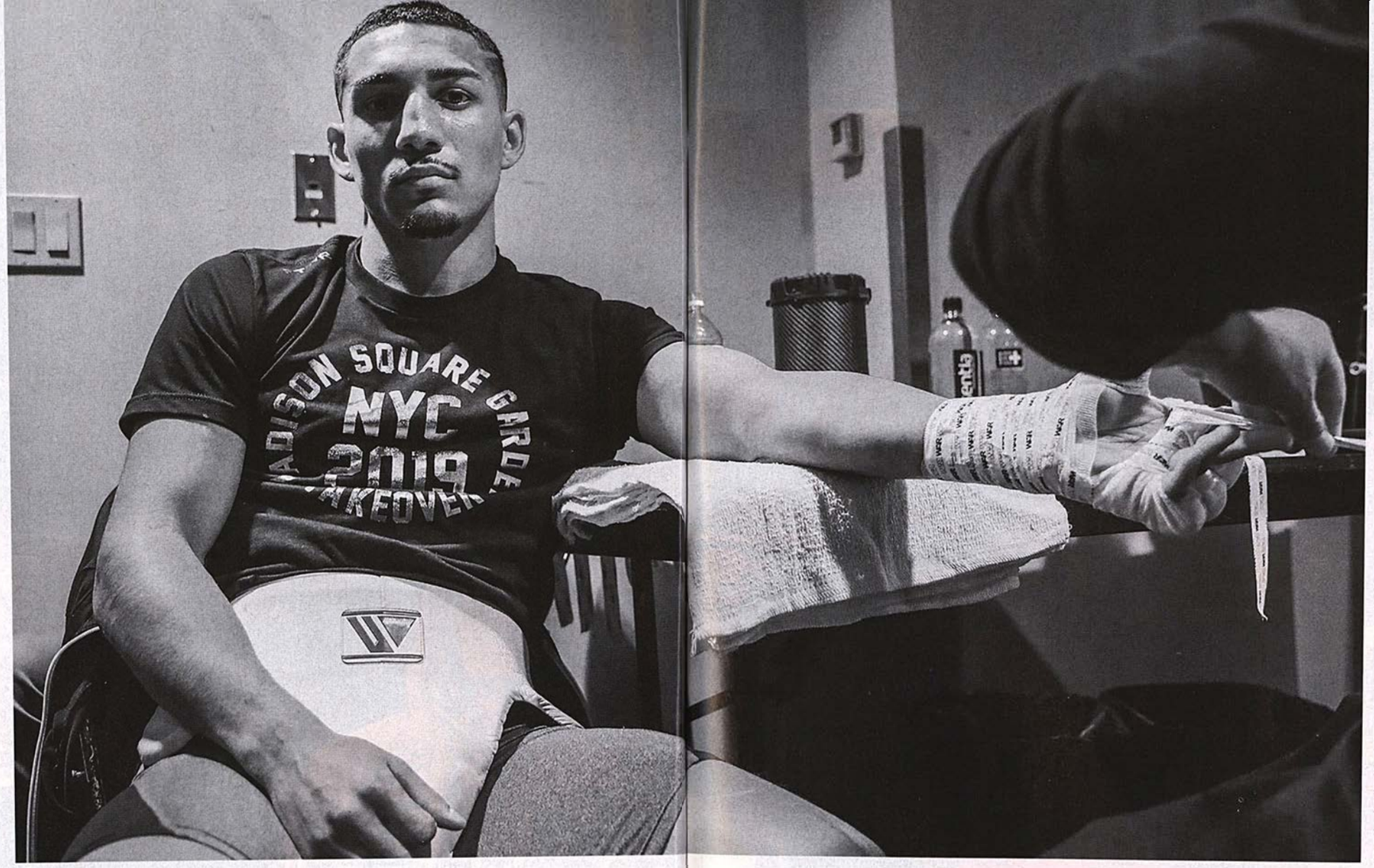
2018 PROSPECT OF THE YEAR **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** WAS DEEMED 'EXPOSED' AFTER ONE SUBPAR PERFORMANCE, BUT HE SOON REJUSTIFIED THE HYPE

By **Ryan Songalia**

For Teofimo Lopez, everything came so easy in his pro career – until the moment it didn't. He had dealt with setbacks in the amateurs, including missing out on the U.S. Olympic team in 2016 (despite winning the Trials) and then losing in his opening fight for the Honduras team to eventual lightweight silver medalist Sofiane Oumiha. The night last July in Maryland was different. Lopez hadn't lost to Masayoshi Nakatani – the scorecards were wide in his favor, in fact – but he hadn't met expectations either. Few fans who tuned in to ESPN+ are likely to have seen Nakatani before, and that likely tinted the way Lopez's performance was viewed. But when you are accustomed to a fighter hitting Heisman poses and doing backflips to celebrate knockouts, any fallibility is bound to be amplified.

On this night, Lopez's catch-and-counter attack, which had proved efficient against overmatched foes like Mason Menard and Diego Magdaleno, wasn't producing magic. The taller Japanese fighter showed he didn't enter the fight as unbeaten by accident. His long reach meant he could hit Lopez with jabs and right hands from a distance while Lopez fell short frequently with his own punches.

From the ESPN broadcast booth, Andre Ward's scorecard was far closer than those of the three official judges. Timothy Bradley remarked that Lopez had



Lopez was dialed in for Commey and will remain so for Lomachenko.

been "exposed" and suggested that he wasn't ready for his mandatory shot at IBF lightweight titleholder Richard Commey.

It was a crash course for The Ring's 2018 Prospect of the Year in how fickle the sport can be. "And just like that you ain't shit no more," the Brooklyn-born Lopez tweeted afterward.

It wasn't until later on, when ESPN's Mark Kriegel chronicled how the young fighter's life was in turmoil, with friction between his new wife and the family he grew up in starting to wear him down, that it became clear that Lopez wasn't in the best frame of mind heading into fight night. "You forget that he's just a baby," said David McWater, Lopez's manager. "If he was a professional football player, he'd be a senior in college; he wouldn't even be in the pros yet."

In public spheres, the thought that Commey would be too big of a leap for Lopez became a popular take. Commey was, after all, a well-respected fighter, the kind of hard-hitting tough guy who could bring out any vulnerability in an immature upstart and tear it open like a hole in an old shirt.

When they did meet on December 14 in New York, just four minutes into the fight, Lopez made his move. The two men opted simultaneously for right hands, only Lopez's hit the mark first. Commey stumbled forward awkwardly, touching the canvas for a moment before wobbling into the ropes. The fight was already over at this point, but the champion earns the benefit of the doubt, and in this instance it led to a dozen unanswered punches along the ropes before the referee intervened.

It was another big knockout at The Garden, another running backflip and another trophy pose on Heisman night. As great an accomplishment as it was for Lopez to win a world title, it was also a relief.

"To be real with y'all ...," Lopez began at the post-fight press conference, then warned of the expletive to come, "... but fuck everybody. That was my moment there.

"For once in my life, I am proud of myself for the way everything turned out. That's been a long time, 22 years, to say that."

Even Vasiliy Lomachenko, the elite pound-for-pounder who holds the other three titles and the Ring championship at 135 pounds, had to acknowledge the young upstart.

"Welcome to my club," said the Ukrainian star before inviting Lopez to "unificate." "See you in April," he added.

April will most likely turn into May instead, according to Top Rank vice president Carl Moretti, as the big showdown between the stablemates looks to be their next step. Still, there's plenty to iron out before an offer is sent out, like the location. Despite the fight seemingly a perfect fit for New York, where both are known entities, Lomachenko's manager, Egis Klimas, doesn't want it in the rising star's hometown. McWater also has a few conditions he'd like met for the fight to occur.

"We're not gonna fight him in Tehran and we're not gonna fight him for $800,000," said McWater. "Assuming everything is normal, that's the next fight."

Going straight to the biggest star in the division right after winning your first belt says a lot about Lopez's ambition, but it's the fight Lopez has wanted all along.

"It differentiates him from a lot of other young fighters," said Moretti. "You see some fighters who are champions now who don't want to take any risk, or secondary champions who are just very happy and content doing what they're doing, not striving to be one of the best in the sport or the best in their respective divisions. I think with Teofimo and Shakur (Stevenson), they're leading the way with that. They just want to fight the best, and it's very rare to see that at such a young age."

Lopez's father and trainer, Teofimo Sr., believes he sees something in the three-division champion that they can exploit.

"(Lomachenko) has lied to all of you guys. He's a fake. This guy has never fought anyone. Give me a name that is even close to my son," said Teofimo Sr., who feels that Lomachenko jumps in and out, right in front of opponents, the same way Commey did. He's also not happy with Lomachenko saying he won't fight in New York, saying that all parties should be open to fighting wherever they can make the most money.

"I'll bet all my life on that fight," Teofimo Sr. adds. "I'll stop training if I have to if this guy even gives (my son) any trouble. Lomachenko is already scared."

Part of the reason the fight has to happen now is Lopez's growing body. While his team says he made 135 pounds for the Commey fight with ease, he has struggled in the past and has already begun looking up the scale. "If Lomachenko wasn't there now at 135, (Lopez) might have moved to 140," said Moretti.

There, Lopez would have no shortage of big fights to enhance his legacy. Jose Ramirez, who holds the WBC and WBO belts at junior welterweight, is under the Top Rank umbrella, as is Josh Taylor, the Ring/WBA/IBF unified champ, who recently signed with the company after winning the World Boxing Super Series.

"There's a solid chance Teofimo could beat (Lomachenko), win the four belts, drop them, move up to 140 and unify at 140 in the same year," said McWater. "If Taylor and Ramirez fought in the next six to nine months, Lopez could still fight them this year and unify two titles – completely unify four belts and two titles in the same year. That's unprecedented, and forget about at age 22. You're starting to talk about doing stuff that nobody else did."

First, Lopez has to get past Lomachenko, which is no small task. If Nakatani was an awkward style to look good against, Lomachenko's is one designed to ensure no one has a good night. Driving Lopez, McWater says, are the detractors who say Lopez won't truly be champion until he beats the number one guy in the division. Still, Lopez wasn't losing too much sleep over it as he headed to the Maldives for a celebratory vacation shortly after the turn of the year.

But if he can beat Lomachenko, and do it in style, McWater predicts Lopez will be the biggest star in the sport, outside of perhaps Canelo Alvarez. Teofimo Sr. is in agreement. "We're gonna be like Floyd," he said. "They're gonna have to fight us because that's where the money's gonna be at."

The calculus adds up for Moretti, too.

"He's got charisma, marketability, bilingual; people want to see him. He makes great fights. He's exciting in and out of the ring. It just gets to new levels at that point." RING

MICKEY WILLIAMS/FOR TOP RANK

THIS 'BOOTS' WAS MADE FOR WINNING

WITH A COMBINATION OF FIRST-CLASS TALENT, WORK ETHIC AND FAMILY WISDOM BEHIND HIM, **JARON ENNIS** IS ON A FAST TRACK TO SUCCESS

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

Jaron Ennis needed only four rounds to outclass and overwhelm rugged pressure fighter Baktiyar Eyubov in his first bout of 2020, televised on Showtime from Atlantic City.

You can say predictions of stardom began early for Jaron Ennis. His father, Derrick "Bozy" Ennis, has piles of photos he likes to show off of "Boots" standing there in his flashy white jacket, white shoes and blue gloves, wearing a beaming smile and raising his hands in victory.

Boots was 2 years old.

One afternoon, taking a break from training for a fight to be televised on Showtime in January, Boots was reminded of those early shots taken for a fashion show. He shook his head, semi-embarrassed, grinned and said, "That's crazy, but I remember that. I was around 2. That's where it started. I see pictures like that and it reminds me of where I began. It's always been in me. Maybe call it destiny for me to be a world champion and the best fighter in the world someday."

That's where it looks like the undefeated 22-year-old welterweight from Philadelphia can go.

After Boots made easy work of the rugged Bakhtiyar Eyubov in the aforementioned showcase, his record jumped to 25-0 with 23 knockouts. He knows bigger jumps are in store this year. He's 5-foot-10, possesses incredible hand speed, has an extensive amateur background and – ingrained in him more than anything else – a love for boxing.

Boots knew how to throw a punch before he could walk – literally. His father, an omnipresent Philadelphia boxing fixture who can be found anywhere from the smallest club shows to world-class fights in Las Vegas casinos, used to take an infant Boots to "The Dungeon," the hellhole of a gym where he was training his older sons Derek (aka "Pooh") and Farah.

"Boxing has always been a part of me," Boots said. "There are a lot of guys I know in the sport that don't love it. If (there was) a bed in the gym, I would sleep in here. When I was a baby, I was in a walker hitting the heavy bag before I could walk.

"I box because I love it. It's tough to beat someone when they love what they do. Look at Floyd Mayweather. He was raised around boxing. And regardless of what anyone says about Floyd, he loves boxing. He loves conditioning. I'm the same way.

"My father, my brothers, my friends, no one has to force me to box. No one has to force me to go to the gym and work out. If you know me, right after I fight, I'm right back in the gym working out, preparing for the next fight."

Lessons learned from a pair of older brothers who were gifted fighters, too.

Derek is 39 now. He's a little rounder these days and the hard edges he once had as a budding 5-foot-8 junior middleweight (24-5-1, 13 KOs) are long gone. What remains are the constant warnings he has for Jaron, who is 17 years younger.

Derek had a decent career that could have been better. And he knows it. What derailed both him and his brother Farah, now 37, a 6-foot super middleweight who finished his career with a 22-2 (12 KOs) mark, was a lack of discipline.

Bozy would constantly question both Derek and Farah as they were coming up, challenging them with his patented bromide, "Do you want to be famous-famous, or Philly-famous?" In other words, known in the Philly boxing circles or known throughout the world.

"It reached a point when Pooh and Farah thought they could do anything, where they thought they could party and not train and not listen to me outside the gym," Bozy recalled. "Once they got out there, everything started changing."

The times Pooh and Farah were in shape, Bozy said, they won.

"I'll admit it, I messed up," Pooh says today. "My career was OK, but I know it could have been better. The only one I have to blame is myself. It was in me to be better. But I was never in shape for any of my fights. I used to party a lot. I liked being in the limelight. Farah was the same way.

"Boxing to me seemed to come so easy, I didn't have to work that hard – or not as hard as I should have worked. I was my own worst enemy. I beat myself all of the time by not being prepared. A week before a fight, Boots is like one or two pounds from making weight. Me, I was 15, 20 pounds off the weight and I had to kill myself to make it.

"Boots isn't like that at all. He loves boxing. He lives a disciplined lifestyle, and we're constantly on Boots about the mistakes me and my brother made. I see it in Boots that he can be a superstar. He will be a superstar."

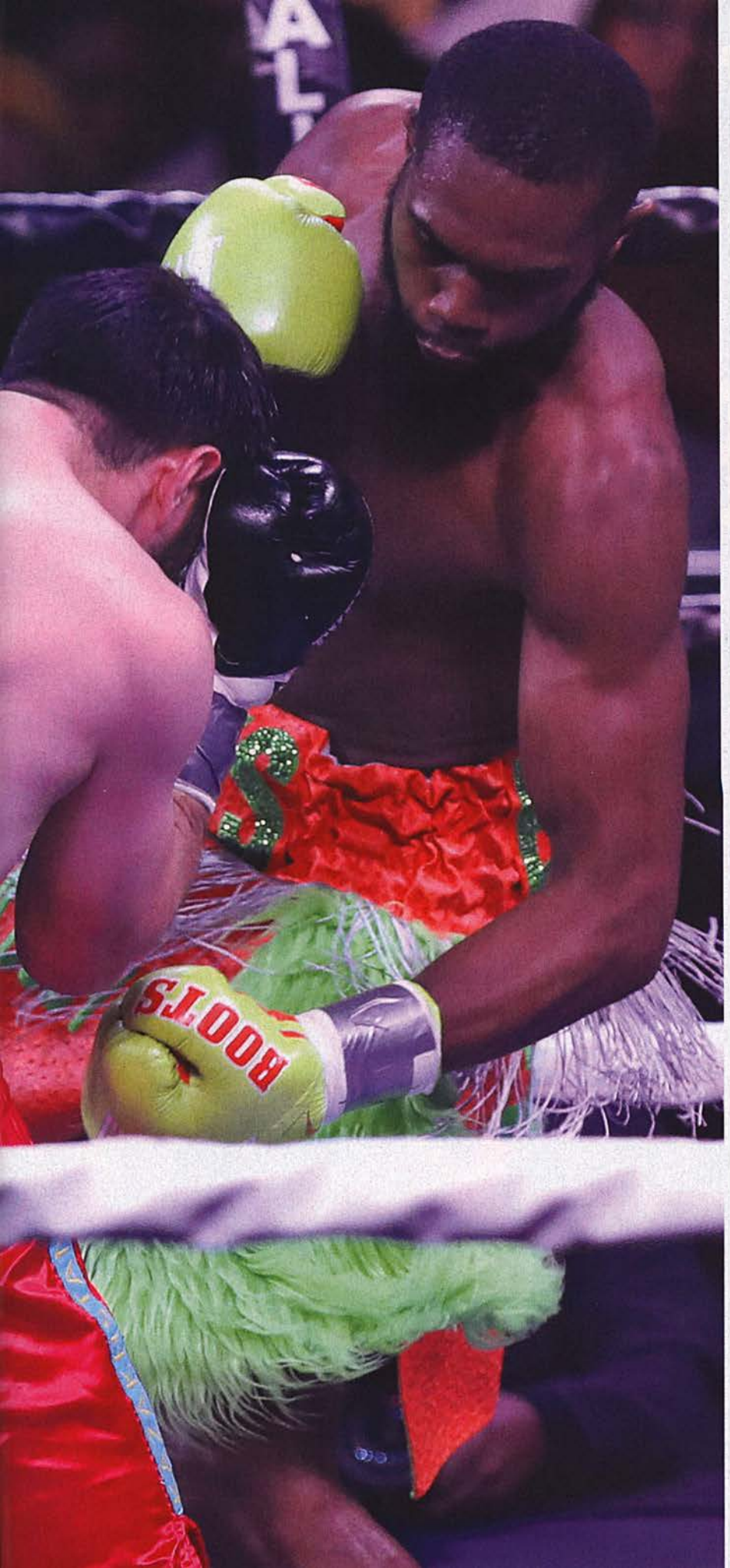
Indeed, Boots aspires to be "famous-famous."

What makes him so dangerous in the ring is his unpredictability. In addition to being tall for a welterweight, he's ambidextrous. One moment he was pounding on the smaller, courageous Eyubov right-handed, and the next round left-handed. It's an ongoing theme for Team Ennis, to always keep things fluid – so much so that they never have a game plan going into a fight. Back in October 2019 in an eventual third-round TKO of Demian Fernandez, Bozy noticed that each time Boots stepped forward in the first round, Fernandez couldn't handle the pressure. So they applied more. Their ad hoc approach works for them – and it can be scary for Boots' opponents.

"It's the way it's always been," Bozy said. "I'll see something or Boots will tell me something between rounds, and we'll create a plan as the fight goes along. It's why no one can build a plan against us. And regardless of what the other guy does, we've seen it all.

"There's nothing we can't game plan against."

Boots views 2020 as his coming-out party. Hardcore fight fans are aware of who he is. But he's hoping to make the crossover move this year, or at least create a pathway for even larger success in 2021. He's looking to fight three more times this year: once in April, against possibly a former titlist, once in August or September and then closing out the year in October or November.



Ennis' impressive body attack was on display vs. Eyubov.

"That's the goal, but getting people to fight me is the issue," Boots said. "I keep with a regular schedule every day. It rarely changes. My brothers keep letting me know the mistakes they made and my dad makes things easier.

"My dad is kind of like my brother, but when he talks, I listen. Pooh and Farah keep hammering me about being focused and not let the partying and the women and the streets get to you. They had to get ready. I'm always ready. I run and train on Friday nights. I have a girlfriend and I live a normal life. But I also live a boxer's life.

"The gym is my 'happy place.'"

Bozy, who turned 64 in February and is in incredible shape, is the patriarch. He still spars with his fighters, with the exception of Boots. But together, Team Ennis is already preparing for the world's top welterweights, and it doesn't matter to them which one. It could be Terence Crawford or Manny Pacquiao or Errol Spence Jr.

"These guys can't keep ducking him," Bozy said. "Boots wants to fight these top guys now, but I tell him to take his time. He's knocking guys out and he hasn't even got his man-strength yet. We'll be patient. We're going to be OK."

Cameron Dunkin, the 2007 Boxing Writers Association of America Manager of the Year, has always had a keen eye for talent. The owner of NOW Boxing Promotions, Dunkin developed Danny Romero, Johnny Tapia, Kelly Pavlik and Timothy Bradley.

Now he has Boots.

"I had an idea Boots was special, but not this special," Dunkin admitted. "I never knew Crawford was special, and we all know how he's taken off. ... I've had some great ones. Boots could be the greatest one of them all. He's that good."

DOWN BUT NEVER OUT

MIGUEL BERCHELT'S PROMISING CAREER SEEMED SPOILED AFTER A DEVASTATING LOSS, BUT THE PROUD MEXICAN HAS BOUNCED BACK TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE 130-POUND DIVISION

By **Anson Wainwright**

Six years and 16 victories removed from a first-round KO loss, Miguel Berchelt finds himself on top of the 130-pound division with major fights lined up for 2020.

Miguel Berchelt has come a long way in the past few years – a *very* long way, considering how he bounced back from a loss that nearly destroyed his career entirely.

In January 2017, the big-punching Mexican took the WBC 130-pound title from Francisco Vargas by impressively stopping his countryman in 11 rounds. He then turned back challenges from the likes of former beltholder Takashi Miura, perennial contender Miguel Roman and Vargas in a rematch on his way to the summit of his division. In early November, sitting atop The Ring's junior lightweight rankings, Berchelt knocked out hard-nosed New Jerseyan Jason Sosa to tally the sixth successful defense of his belt.

It's all a far cry from his inauspicious start in Cancun, Mexico – a city that hosts paradise-seekers from around the world even as it struggles with poverty and drug cartel violence.

"We didn't have much money, but we never missed anything," Berchelt (37-1, 33 knockouts) told The Ring through co-promoter Mario Abraham.

"I had a nice childhood in the city of Cancun with my grandparents, my mother and my (two) sisters. When my grandmother died, it was a hard thing for me, the saddest moment of my life."

Initially, Berchelt wanted to play soccer. However, he didn't get scouted and decided at 17 to try boxing and follow in the footsteps of local hero Rodolfo Lopez, who held the WBC featherweight title in 2006. He hasn't looked back since.

"I was very good from the beginning," he explained. "I was sent to the Mexican Olympic Committee. I was there with fighters like Andy Ruiz, Jessie

Vargas, (Francisco) 'Bandido' Vargas, Oscar Valdez and Carlos Cuadras. But they didn't allow me to compete for a place in London 2012 – I had 72 amateur fights with only five losses – so I decided to become a professional."

His first fight as a pro was in November 2010 in the nearby city of Mérida. He won his first 17 fights before fighting in the U.S. for the first time, appearing on the undercard of the Brandon Rios-Mike Alvarado rematch in March 2013.

He impressed with a first-round knockout. Three more wins followed before disaster struck.

The now 28-year-old boxer-puncher was stunningly derailed in the first round by relative unknown Luis Eduardo Florez in March 2014. Berchelt's once-promising career lay in ruins.

"At that time I felt that I was invincible," he said "I trained just the necessary amount and didn't care about the opponent and the weight.

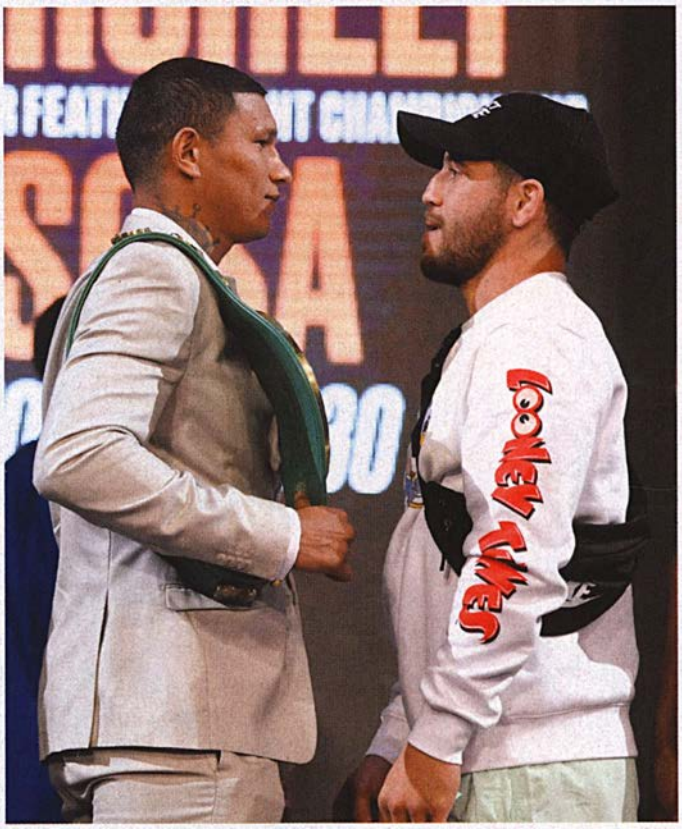
"I tried to win by knockout in the first round like all my fights at that time, and yes, he caught me with a big left hook. He was a lot taller than me and I wasn't used to it. Then I found out that he fought at 140 pounds.

"Maybe the referee could have allowed me to continue fighting, but now I think it was better for me that the fight was stopped."

The startling loss hit Berchelt hard, but once he'd collected himself he made a promise to his team.

"When I stopped crying in the dressing room, I told my promoter, Mario Abraham, 'I won't lose a fight again,'" he said. "I knew what I did wrong before the fight and it would not happen again. People who knew me were telling me to blame the referee, but I knew it was all my fault. Mario told me that we had to leave the loss behind, and I agreed with that."

Abraham co-promotes Berchelt with Top Rank and Fernando Beltran's Zanfer Promotions. Beltran has run the company for over 25 years and produced in excess of 50 titleholders, including the likes of Jose Luis Castillo, Erik Morales and Jorge Arce.



Berchelt's most recent title defense (No. 6) came against Jason Sosa.

Beltran, who is closely aligned with all the other major promoters and TV stations, shoulders his share of the blame for Berchelt's setback.

"It was not only his fault; it was also mine," Beltran lamented. "It was a big lesson for us and one we learned from."

Abraham had faith that his fighter would bounce back.

"I always knew that it was an accident and that Miguel was able to go forward," said Abraham. "I also knew that we had to make adjustments in his career.

"He moved from Mérida to Hermosillo to train with Alfredo Caballero, a young, talented and hardworking trainer who was working with a great world champion, Juan Francisco 'Gallo' Estrada. I put all my confidence in Alfredo, and he did a brilliant job with Miguel."

To Berchelt's credit, he overcame and even thrived in the adversity by rebounding with nine stoppage wins, ending with George Jupp in six rounds and Chonlatarn Piriyapinyo in four rounds, to earn his shot at Vargas and the WBC 130-pound title.

Looking back, Berchelt now sees the loss as a blessing that helped him get to where he is today.

"Actually it was useful for me; picking Alfredo Caballero (to be my trainer) was the best decision," he explained. "Since I began training with Alfredo, I have 14 wins in a row, 13 by KO."

Berchelt was sitting ringside in Las Vegas on Thanksgiving weekend to watch former amateur teammate Oscar Valdez stop late sub Adam Lopez in seven rounds.

"It was difficult for him since his opponent, (Andres) 'Jaguar' Gutierrez, didn't make weight," he acknowledged. "Adam Lopez is a young, talented fighter. He is very fast. Oscar had problems in the early rounds, but then he solved those problems and won the fight. It was a very good fight."

Now Berchelt, who has long craved a big fight, is ready to meet Valdez in what looks like a can't-miss all-action fight that both fighters

SIZING UP THE COMPETITION

Berchelt tops a talented division that features a variety of styles.

Here's what Miguel Berchelt had to say about The Ring's junior lightweight ratings:

1. Miguel Berchelt, 37-1 (33 KOs): "I am the best, most powerful and spectacular 130-pounder in the world. My best punches are my jab and hook to the liver, and I am very intelligent in the ring. I can box or I can go forward, depending on the opponent."

2. Tevin Farmer, 30-4-1 (6 KOs): "He is a southpaw, fast, without a TV-friendly style, and very low power. I saw him from ringside against (Kenichi) Ogawa and he didn't impress me at all. I want to watch him against (Joseph) Diaz. Interesting fight."

3. Jamel Herring, 21-2 (10 KOs): "He has a difficult style, very tall for the division, with low power. He talks too much on Twitter, but I met him in Vegas and he seems like a good person. I don't think he can take my power. (Lamont) Roach, a guy with low power, was hurting him."

4. Joseph Diaz, 30-1 (15 KOs): "I haven't seen him fight since he was at 126. I will be attentively watching at his next fight against Farmer."

5. Rene Alvarado, 32-8 (21 KOs): "A brave fighter with great heart, always going forward and throwing blows."

6. Masayuki Ito, 26-2-1 (14 KOs): "I saw him fighting against Herring. He has a good right hand and speed, but he got desperate in that fight and couldn't solve Herring's style."

7. Andrew Cancio, 21-5-2 (16 KOs): "A warrior with many battles ahead. He shocked boxing by beating (Alberto) Machado, but he couldn't stand up to Alvarado's fierceness."

8. Miguel Roman, 62-13 (47 KOs): "A true Mexican warrior with a big heart. He lasted a lot longer than I expected when we fought."

9. Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov, 15-0 (12 KOs): "I haven't seen him. I will be looking at his next fight."

10. Chris Colbert, 14-0 (5 KOs): "I haven't seen him fight yet. I only read that he beat (Jezreel) Corrales."

hope to consummate in 2020.

"I think it will be a big fight," Berchelt said. "I respect Oscar, he is a friend, but we are professionals. It's a fight I have wanted for a long time, since I was an amateur. It will be a war, as always with two Mexicans in the ring. It will be like the (Erik) Morales vs. (Marco Antonio) Barrera wars."

Top Rank vice president Carl Moretti wouldn't commit to any specific matchups but feels Berchelt has grown into his championship and is one of the best fighters in the world.

"Berchelt has really emerged as an elite fighter, and probably the best in his weight class," said Moretti. "He doesn't do anything great, but it would take a great fighter to beat him.

"He has physical advantages such as size, conditioning and a great chin that make him a tough out for anyone. His fan-friendly style, his personality and charisma make him must-see."

Beltran acknowledges the leaps and bounds Berchelt has taken since that difficult night in March 2014.

"Miguel is the best fighter I have today," said the promoter. "I'm very proud to be partners with Max Boxing (Abraham's Yucatan-based promotional company) working with Miguel. He's our lethal weapon. That's why I can assure you he'll clean out the 135- and 140-pound divisions in the future."

"El Alacran" (The Scorpion) also has aspirations of fighting three-weight Ukrainian master Vasiliy Lomachenko.

"That's the fight I want in the near future, maybe at the end of 2020, but first it's the Valdez fight," he said. "I can only think about this fight. I have to have a great training camp to beat Oscar, and then I will think about Lomachenko." RING

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

ALL IN GOOD TIME

HER QUEST FOR A WORLD TITLE WENT ON HOLD WHEN SHE WAS STILL A TEENAGER, BUT 31-YEAR-OLD **ADELAIDA RUIZ** IS BACK AND STRONGER THAN EVER

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

As one of 11 children, it's a safe assumption that Adelaida Ruiz had to learn how to fight. She doesn't deny it.

"We only had one bathroom," she laughs. By the time she was 12, Ruiz had gloves on and was chasing big goals.

"I had a dream to go to the Olympics, but that wasn't happening because women's boxing wasn't in the Olympics then."

Ruiz did have talent, though, with her 36-3 amateur record a sign that the Southern California product had what it took to make noise in the pro ranks. But then life intervened, and when the Los Angeles teenager got pregnant at 17, her boxing career was seemingly over, even if she did hope to return one day.

"I decided to stop my career to be a mother," said Ruiz. "But I always had it in my head that I'm going to go back to the gym and I will accomplish my dream to become a world champion. I wanted to show everybody that everything and anything is possible."

Fourteen years later, it's finally possible for the 31-year-old Ruiz.

Adelaida Ruiz, 9-0 since turning pro in her late 20s three years ago, is on the verge of a title shot.

Now the mother of three children (Julian, 13; Joanna, 11; Jordan, 9), Ruiz has reached a point in her life where boxing finally has a place again, and she's taking advantage of it. Winner of nine pro fights without a loss since turning pro in 2017, "La Cobra" is making noise on the local circuit thanks to her knockout power, and she's gone international by earning recognition from The Ring for 2018's Knockout of the Year (against Brenda Enriquez) and as 2019's Prospect of the Year. As for 2020...

"I will become the interim WBC super flyweight world champion. Hopefully."

At press time, it looked like that hope may become a reality against an opponent to be named on March 28. But in the boxing world, nothing is set in stone until it's set in stone,

and Ruiz knows it.

"I've learned to be patient," said Ruiz, who learned long ago to keep her hopes in check and deal with the reality of what was in front of her. And after giving birth to Julian, the reality was that she had to work a "regular" job, one far removed from the glamour of the prize ring. Soon, Joanna joined the family, and when the opportunity to make a couple bucks arrived through an appearance on Jose Luis Sin Censura, a since-canceled television show that can best be described as "The Mexican Jerry Springer Show," Ruiz was all in.

"That show came out, I want to say 12 years ago," she laughs. "I had stopped boxing, I already had my daughter and I went to a show to go see a singer, but the seats got full so we stayed for the second show and they asked me, 'Do you want to come out on the show? We'll pay you a hundred dollars.' A hundred dollars for diapers and formula? Great. (Laughs) I was getting paid eight dollars an hour back then. They said, 'You don't need to fight, you just need to answer the questions they ask you.' And once I was there, they made it a fighting show and I'm like, 'Oh man, what did I get myself into?' I just went along and did my thing."

The result was what you would expect. Ruiz and her "opponents" traded barbs about some fictional beef and the fists started flying. Comments on a YouTube clip documenting her foray into reality television praised the hands of "the girl in the purple shirt," but Ruiz didn't get a similar reaction from her father, Juan, when she came home from the taping.

"When I got home, my dad was so mad at me," she said. "He was like, 'Really? What happened to your face? Was that even worth the money they gave you?'"

She laughs at it all now, but at the time, it was as close as she was going to get to a fight. And that doesn't mean life was bad, as she gave birth to Jordan two years later and settled into the job she still has doing front office work for a medical facility. But there was still that itch, not only to achieve her dreams in the ring, but to do it for her father as well.

"I've always been daddy's girl," said Ruiz. "We're very similar; we think alike, and sometimes we do clash with each other. (Laughs) He wanted to be a boxer, but my grandma never allowed it. Boxing wasn't an option for him back in Mexico."

Boxing was an option for his daughter in the United States, though, and as her kids got older, she decided that it was time to give the sport another try in 2017.

"(My kids) understand more that I have a dream to become a world champion," she said. "So they tag along to the gym and they know I have to wake up a little bit earlier to go do my running, and they understand. And between fights they know I spend all my time with them, versus when I have a fight coming up they know they have to be patient with me. We ended up working it out."

Ruiz's dad is even part of the operation as her current head trainer. And he couldn't be prouder.

"He's another reason why I continued doing it and making sacrifices, because I feel like he's living his dream within me," she said. "So he's another motivation and he's happy. He shows me off everywhere. He's always with his phone, 'Oh, go on YouTube, this is my daughter. Follow her on Instagram.' Sometimes I see him taking the person's phone and saying, 'Let me type it up for you.'"

Ruiz laughs, happy that the family is on board with her new pro career, allowing her to attack her 115-pound peers with the abandon that has made her a fan favorite. So why haven't the big promoters come knocking? Well, they have.

"I'm just not answering," she said. "It's not because I'm not interested, it's just that the offers they put out there for me don't make sense. So I don't open the door."

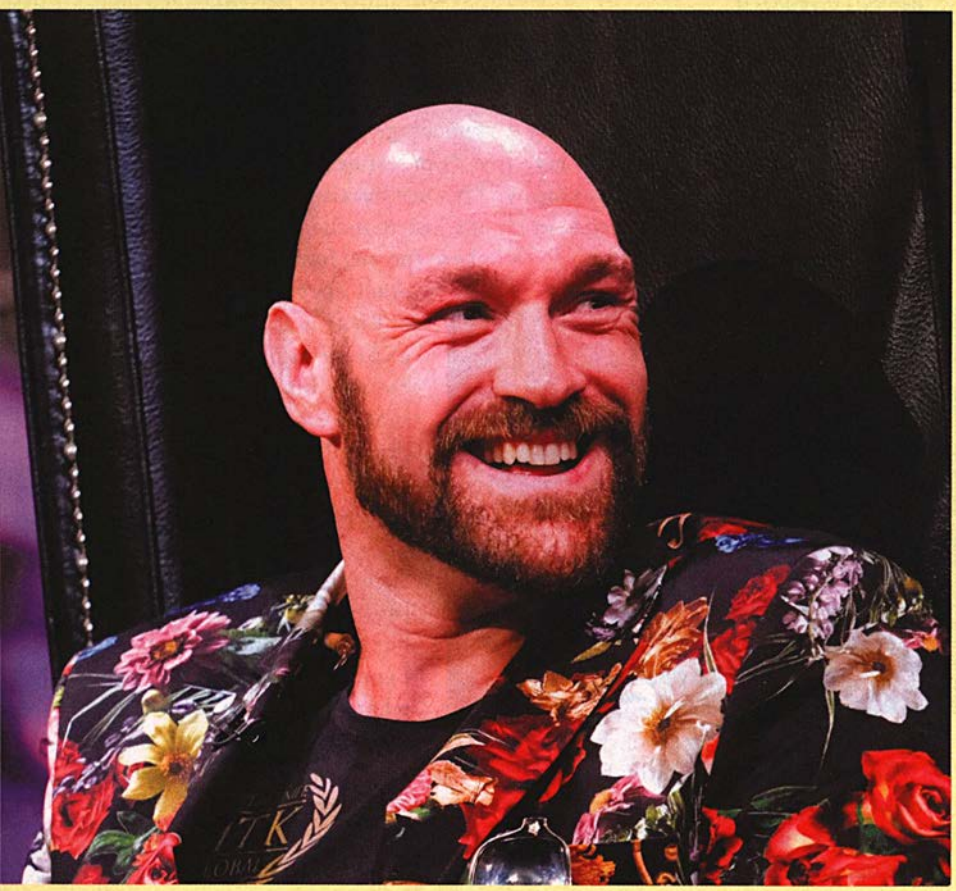
That's the voice of experience, not just in boxing, but in life. Without that, would she have taken those offers 10 years ago?

"I would have," she admits. "But what they don't understand is that I'm not money-hungry. So I'm not looking at the money. It's boxing. How many fights am I gonna be guaranteed? That's what I'm looking for. I work full-time and I'm pretty stable with what I'm doing, and I love my job and I love what I do. So it's more about how many fights they're going to offer me."

A world title, interim or not, will help Ruiz's future prospects, and she knows it. And even if she has to wait a while for that shot at a belt, as long as she keeps fighting and winning, she'll get where she wants to be. And she knows it. She also knows she's going to do it her way.

"At times, I saw this as impossible because my kids were little, but I always wanted to come back to the boxing world. And when I did come back, I was pretty known, so everybody here in Southern California was like, 'Wow, Cobra, you're back. We haven't seen a female boxer as good as you.' And I also got negatives, like, 'You could have been a world champion by now. Now it's too late for you.' But the negativity made me like, 'Really?' I'm gonna do it. It's never too late."

WORLD BEAT



British heavyweight boxing is in a good place, thanks to the likes of Tyson Fury and his stablemate Daniel Dubois.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

Imagine if Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua were never to meet in a ring. Unimaginable, right? But you just never know in boxing. We could be saying the same thing a year from now. Let us hope it does not go that way as their careers play out. Too much money to lose, yes, but also a clash of styles and the proof of skills for a generation.

"It would be a travesty if they never fight," promoter Frank Warren explained to me recently. "They're in their prime, and not many fighters fight each other in their prime. Mike Tyson fought Lennox Lewis when he was older. Wilder and Fury are both in their prime. Joshua and Fury are the same age. Of course I want to see them in the ring together.

"Business should make it happen because it's a huge fight. I'll be very disappointed as a boxing fan if it doesn't happen. Actually I'd be disgusted. We have to make it happen."

In the next two or three fights?

"Yes, it has to happen in the next three fights," Warren said.

"These are very exciting times for world heavyweight boxing, but more importantly it's an exciting time for British heavyweight boxing. What do I put it down to? We've got all these big guys who have been successful (amateurs, medaling in Olympic Games) back-to-back. We had Audley (Harrison) and (Joe) Joyce and Joshua. They've all come through into the pro ranks one after the other.

"I don't think the GB (national amateur team) setup did much for Tyson. He turned pro when he was 18, same as Daniel (Dubois)," Warren tailed off, mentioning the fast-rising young heavyweight about whom many are enthusing.

"In our stable we've got Tyson, who is No. 1. We've got Dubois, who everyone thinks will be the next thing. Nathan Gorman can come again. Then you've got Whyte and Chisora, who we'd love to fight Dubois.

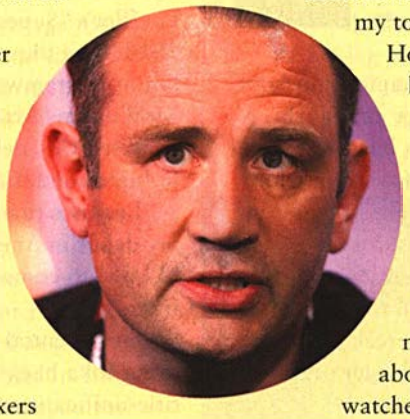
"These big guys, what else are they going to do in this country? You can be a rugby player. Basketball isn't big here. If you're a big guy and can fight, you can make seven-figure sums. Where else can they do that?"

Dubois is being lined up for his first high-profile fight in the summer with Rio Olympics silver medalist Joyce (10-0, 9 KOs), an all-British clash that will cause interest and create a gate. "We're in discussions at the moment. We're getting a little bit closer to it happening," offered Warren. "My job this year is to get Daniel into a No. 1 spot. Whoever is the champion, he'll have to fight him. Joyce isn't a walkover. That's a tough fight. I think Daniel can box and he's a tremendous puncher. He's learning every fight. Joyce has got a lot to live up to. He's got miles and miles more of experience than Daniel. He's got loads of time to prepare for Daniel."

★★★

On the Olympics theme, the British amateur boxing team will have the advantage of home support at a Tokyo Games qualifying tournament that takes place in London from March 14-24. Great Britain has won eight medals at the last two Games, four of them gold. At the qualifying event in March, 450 men and women from 50-plus countries will compete at the Copper Box Arena on the former Olympic Park with 77 places at stake – 50 available to the men in eight weight categories, 27 for women in five divisions.

Under performance director Rob McCracken, a decade of unprecedented success has underwritten a state-of-the-art facility that is as good as any on the planet. Men and women from Great Britain have won 63 medals at 19 major championships under McCracken's broad team, the coach himself having also guided Anthony Joshua's rise to become the current IBF, WBA and WBO heavyweight titleholder. "Our boxers had a very good year in 2019, when the men and women won 16 medals at four major competitions, so they are coming into this on a good run of form," said McCracken.



Anthony Joshua's trainer, Robert McCracken, coaches the British amateur team.

"The qualifier will be very tough, as a lot of the European nations are strong in boxing, so it is good that it is taking place in this country. Hopefully the home support will spur our boxers on and help them to perform at their best."

Cheavon Clarke will box at heavyweight (the last six remaining will qualify) and Ben Whittaker at light heavy (semifinalists qualify for Tokyo). "It's a fantastic setup," said Clarke, a bronze medalist at the 2019 European Games in Belarus. "When we go to tournaments, people know we're there. You can see them looking over their shoulders and they're worried. That's Rob who has turned it all around. All the staff and backroom staff, too. UK Sport (the government body that funds based on the medals won at major tournaments) has made it a fortress and such a great place to be.

"We go there for the gold. None of us boys at GB Boxing expect to just get a medal. We expect gold. Gold medal is the standard and nothing else."

Whittaker claimed a bronze medal at the World Amateur Championships last year in Russia. "I didn't even want to go and collect the medal, to be honest," he said. "All of us boxers strive for gold, so it's just one of those things. It's a great achievement representing my town and country. Hopefully I can do better. Got to get the qualifiers out of the way and hopefully go a few better in the Olympics.

"When I first started boxing, I never really thought about the Olympics. I watched 2012 and I didn't really know who any of the boxers were, but I saw the raw emotion of winning a medal. I thought I wouldn't mind that feeling. I went down to my local gym and was swinging it out. Did the local shows and got the call to go on Team GB. Now it's on my doorstep to go there. It's going to be a great honor, and I can't wait to be there." That is how legacy is born.

★★★

The British Boxing Writers had a lunch with former heavyweight titleholder Frank Bruno a couple of months back. It was at Little Italy, in the heart of Soho, run by Luigi and Antonio Polledri, who have a huge, permanent Rocky Marciano poster next door at Bar Italia, which they also own. Bruno was in good form, enjoying the new glut of heavyweights, and is convinced Dubois will win a world title. "He comes from a good stock. Me and his dad are from the same era. He's young and his sister is (a Junior) Olympic champion. His brother fights for England. It's in the family. But his feet are on the ground.

"As long as he's doing what he's got to do, there comes a time when he'll run out of opponents because no one will want to fight him. The nicest thing about him is he's very nice, humble and focused. As long as he can continue to be a normal human being, he'll go far. He can punch with two hands, but the nicest thing he's got is a good jab. He ain't even woken up yet; he's got a lot of maturing to do. I hope Frank Warren and whoever don't get in the habit of rushing him. Once he gets into that level of rushing, he can't come back. Once he's settled and set, he'll be an opponent."

And Big Frank? "I've got myself a trainer's license and I've got a building to do non-contact boxing for mental health," explained the 58-year-old, who remains in terrific physical shape. He does not hanker to be back in this era, having had 45 fights, with 40 wins and 38 knockouts. Big Frank claimed the world title on the fourth attempt, defeating Oliver McCall. Bruno remains a national sporting treasure. "I've done what I had to do. I'm not wishing my life away. I had a long innings. I retired 24 years ago, and this is the busiest I've ever been," he told me. "I'm ducking and diving. I'm still making a little bit of crust. I'm not greedy. It's greed and bitterness to wish you were around today. This is a different era, so let them get on with it. Bitterness is a sickness." Amen to that. Cheers.

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for The London Telegraph.

ETHAN MILLER

Kazuto Ioka found success against Jeyvier Cintron when he got inside his taller opponent's reach.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

It's a custom to stage a big boxing event on New Year's Eve in Japan, and Kazuto Ioka has been involved in several of them, including the most recent. There's a good chance that the four-division titleholder will headline future New Year's Eve shows.

On December 31, 2019, Ioka (25-2, 14 KOs) defended his WBO 115-pound title for the first time with a hard-fought unanimous decision over the tough and talented Jeyvier Cintron in the main event at Ohta-City Gymnasium in Tokyo.

The 30-year-old veteran got ready for the tall southpaw, a two-time Olympian from Puerto Rico, with a two-month camp in Las Vegas, where his mentor, Ismael Salas, is based. Despite top-level preparation, he confessed it was very difficult to handle Cintron (11-1, 5 KOs), who brought, in his words, "more than expected" to the hotly contested championship bout.

In his first attempt at a world title, Cintron used a busy, mobile boxing style to confuse Ioka while scoring with long right jabs and powerful left crosses. Ioka took the young challenger's measure during the early rounds and used a body attack to hunt and break down the mandatory challenger over the second half of the bout.

Ioka didn't mind taking punches to get inside, where he landed the harder shots. However, the challenger was tenacious enough to compete to the final bell. Ioka, the aggressor for most of the fight, got the benefit on the official scorecards, winning by 116-112 (twice) and 115-113 tallies.

"I just wanted to give it all I have to impress the fans," the winner said in the ring.

Ioka has matured into a crowd-pleasing fighter. Six months earlier, he made Japanese boxing history by chopping down the much bigger Aston Palicte to a 10th-round stoppage to earn his WBO belt and become the first Japanese male to win a world title in a fourth weight class.

But he began his pro career as a boxing prodigy – just like his uncle Hiroki Ioka, a former two-division beltholder who won his first world title in his ninth pro bout. Kazuto's first world title, which he won in his seventh pro bout in February 2011, was the same one that his uncle won (the WBC strawweight belt).

Ioka added world titles at junior flyweight and flyweight by relying on superb technique and boxing tactics, supported by a "hit without getting hit back" mentality, but his style shifted to taking more risks when he ended a brief retirement to fight on American promoter Tom Loeffler's "Superfly 3" show in 2018. Ioka impressively outpointed junior bantamweight contender McWilliams Arroyo in his HBO-televised U.S. debut at The Forum in Inglewood, California.

"I cannot thank Tom enough for my debut in America," Ioka said. "I hope to come back to the U.S. to fight."

One potential fight that could bring Ioka back to America is a title-unification bout that was proposed by Ring Magazine's editor-in-chief, Doug Fischer, in the last issue: a showdown with Ring Magazine/WBC junior bantamweight champ Juan Francisco Estrada. It's a dream fight that matches Ioka's own ambition.

"Soon, I'll turn 31 years old," he said. "I have to pursue bigger fights to define my career. Estrada is the biggest fight to be made at 115 pounds."

Three-division titleholder Kosei Tanaka shined in the co-feature to Ioka-Cintron, retaining his WBO flyweight belt with a brutal knockout of Chinese journeyman Wulan Tuolehazi (13-4-1, 6 KOs). It was Tanaka's first appearance in a

Tokyo ring since he stopped future strawweight title challenger Ryuji Hara in 2014, and he wanted to make a statement.

Tanaka (15-0, 9 KOs) wasted no time in breaking down Tuolehazi with sharp jabs, one-two combinations and vicious lefts to the body. His every movement was quick and perfect, and the painful shots to the body set up a destructive trap that ended with a three-punch combo to the head. Tuolehazi was blasted to the canvas, where he was counted out at 2:29 of the third round.

"I meant that last combination," Tanaka said. "I'm happy with my performance today, but still not 100 percent. I am undefeated, but I've never been satisfied with what I've done in the ring. I really want to fight in a way that I can satisfy myself someday."

The 24-year-old phenom says that will only happen against the "best of the best." And the WBO might help Tanaka eventually realize his dream with its decision to upgrade him to "super champion." The WBO allows its "super champions" to take the mandatory challenger position when moving up one weight class. WBO president Francisco Varcarcel announced at the annual convention held in Tokyo in December that his organization would support an Ioka-Tanaka showdown at 115 pounds.

The two Japanese stars have the same TV platform, so it seems like an easy superfight to make when both parties see that the time is right.

Tanaka told The Ring during a Los Angeles training camp last November that he would move up in weight before the end of 2020.

★★★

Japan is a jack-in-the-box of small fighters yet unveiled to the world. Strawweight Norihito Tanaka, who recently vacated his national 105-pound belt to the Japanese Boxing Commission for the chance to challenge for a world title, is one of them. The 5-foot slugger (19-7, 10 KOs) has taken a winding, 15-year-long road to his current position. His future seemed bright just two years after his 2005 pro debut, having won nine consecutive bouts. But he struggled once he made it to the circle of nationally ranked strawweights, including an unlucky DQ for hitting after the break against future Ring 108-pound champ Ryoichi Taguchi in 2009 and a 10-round unanimous decision loss in his first attempt to win the Japanese title against future three-division titleholder Akira Yaegashi in 2011. Less than a year later, he quit boxing with 14-5 record and got a job as a cook at a yakitori (skewered chicken) restaurant near his old boxing gym.

But in 2017, Tanaka surprisingly returned to the ring with an exciting third-round KO of Yuto Takahashi following his six-year "vacation." His second boxing life was still a hard one, as he suffered an orbital bone fracture in a decision loss to Naoya Haruguchi and a stoppage loss to OPBF titleholder Tsubasa Koura, but the father of two girls refused to give up again. Six months after the Koura setback, he outpointed Takumi Sakae in the Japanese title elimination tournament. Tanaka then dominated hard-nosed two-time world title challenger Shin Ono from the start and knocked him out in the eighth round to finally become a Japanese champion in January 2019. Let's call him "the Japanese Andrew Cancio" if he completes his Cinderella story in the near future.

Kazuto Ioka put on a powerful display against Wulan Tuolehazi, knocking him out in Round 3.

CANADA

BY JAMIE REBNER

"Don't call it a comeback/I've been here for years." LL Cool J spoke the truth in his fight anthem, "Mama Said Knock You Out," way back in 1990. And it is a fitting description for Jean Pascal's latest

Jean Pascal's back-to-back upset victories in 2019 are remarkable, given his advanced age.

year as a pro. After pulling off one of the upsets of the year against Marcus Browne in August, the Quebec native notched another major victory over Badou Jack on December 28 in Atlanta on the Gervonta Davis-Yuriorkis Gamboa undercard. Both light heavyweight veterans suffered knockdowns in what was a fascinating, evenly matched scrap between two experienced former champions. Pascal was awarded a split decision victory by two scores of 114-112 and had to use every ounce of fighting spirit to do so.

In my inaugural column this past August, I wrote that Pascal would be wise to walk into the sunset of retirement after the win over Browne because I was not too fond of his chances against the other top contenders in the division, including Jack. But I have no problem admitting I was wrong in underestimating Pascal in that matchup. He put on another vintage performance in the twilight of his memorable career, one that I consider among the greatest of history's Canadian boxers.

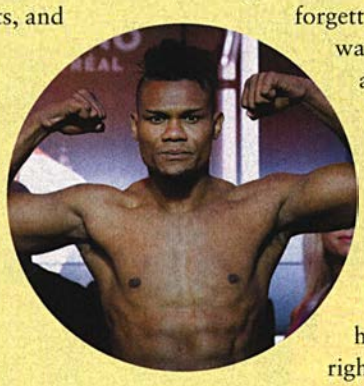
However, despite his performance, I still feel like retiring on top is his best bet considering he has nothing left to prove. While his current form may allow him to be competitive with the 175-pound division's current top contenders, the majority of whom he's already shared the ring with, I don't see the point. If Pascal again beats Browne, who exercised his rematch clause, I can see the powers-that-be salivating over a lucrative showdown between Pascal and Artur Beterbiev in Montreal for local bragging rights. Given the chilling ferocity that Beterbiev displayed during his decisive beatdown of Oleksandr Gvozdyk in October, I would be fearful for Pascal's safety in that matchup.

I see no better time than now to exit the professional game, being on a supreme high after one of his best years as a pro at the ripe age of 37. His 2019 campaign is reminiscent of James Toney and Glen Johnson circa 2003 and 2004, respectively. That's when each grizzled veteran, at 35 years old, pulled one last rabbit out of the hat by claiming the Ring and BWAA Fighter of the Year awards. Although Pascal's victories over Browne and Jack did not earn him serious consideration for the year's best pugilist, they were incredible victories that would put a tidy bow on his tremendous career. However, my gut tells me Pascal will continue fighting. If that's the case, I wish him luck and hope he continues to add more victories to his already formidable legacy.

★★★

Even in today's fistic landscape, where there is a litany of title belts available to be won, becoming champion of the world is no easy task. Winning a world strap deserves applause regardless of the belt at hand or circumstance in which it was won. It's easy for media members and fans to de-value title belts and the fighters that win them merely because of the outrageous number of trinkets up for grabs. Still, to become the best in the world at your chosen profession is an arduous task that many fail to reach and is therefore fully deserving of high praise and admiration.

Steven "Bang Bang" Butler (28-2-1, 24 KOs) learned that lesson the hard way when he traveled to Japan to take on Ryota Murata (16-2, 13 KOs) for his secondary WBA middleweight title. In only his second fight outside of Canada, Butler faced his toughest test to date, in hostile territory to boot. Although Butler had some success in the early going, his defense was porous, and Murata's potent rights continually nailed him. One can only take so many flush power shots, and it was a stinging right that hurt Butler in the fifth round. Murata's follow-up barrage put the valiant Canadian down, and the ref jumped in to wave off the contest, thankfully sparing Butler from further punishment.



Eleider Alvarez proved he's still dangerous vs. Michael Seals.

Butler has nothing to be ashamed of. He gave it his absolute all against a physically strong top-10 middleweight in the latter's home country. At only 24, "Bang Bang" has time to recover and rebuild himself into title contention. When he returns, I expect a series of lower-stakes bouts in Montreal to restore his confidence and provide him opportunities to implement any tactical and technical changes he will undoubtedly be making in the gym.

★★★

Eleider Alvarez (25-1, 13 KOs) made his long-awaited return to the ring on January 18 in an ESPN main event against Michael Seals (24-3, 18 KOs) in Verona, New York. Coming off an 11-month layoff due to an Achilles injury, Alvarez was looking to remind fans that he is still a top contender despite having lost his undefeated record in his most recent tilt with Sergey Kovalev.

Alvarez produced an electrifying knockout in the seventh round, catching Seals with a looping right-hand counter over the American's dropped left hand. The shot sent Seals to the canvas, his head held up only by the bottom rope, and the Alabamian had barely made any progress toward getting out of that position by the time the ref waved it off at the count of seven.

Alvarez's devastating punch instantly became an early candidate for knockout of the year. And luckily, the finishing shot will be the lasting image of what was an otherwise forgettable fight. The bout was utterly devoid of action, with neither fighter able to find his rhythm and let his hands go in combination. They threw one shot at a time, and only Alvarez landed a handful of meaningful right hands. Every miss, of which there were many, resulted in a clinch, and more time was spent holding than punching.

While Alvarez managed to rescue his performance and reputation with a knockout, that doesn't excuse his underwhelming performance up until then. Where was the jarring jab? Or efforts to work the heavy puncher's body? Yes, some factors may have contributed to his lackluster showing, such as recovering from his Achilles injury, ring rust and Seals' vaunted power. But regardless, Alvarez needs to give a much better representation of his skills the next time out to prove he is indeed one of the best light heavyweights in the world. At 35, he can't afford any more sluggish performances if he wants to win another title. And if you believe Twitter to be accurate, his promoter, Yvon Michel, announced that Alvarez would be taking on Gilberto "Zurdo" Ramirez in a WBO title eliminator. If that bout comes to fruition, I sincerely hope, for the fans' sake, that it yields infinitely more action than the Seals fight.

DI NARDO
TORINO

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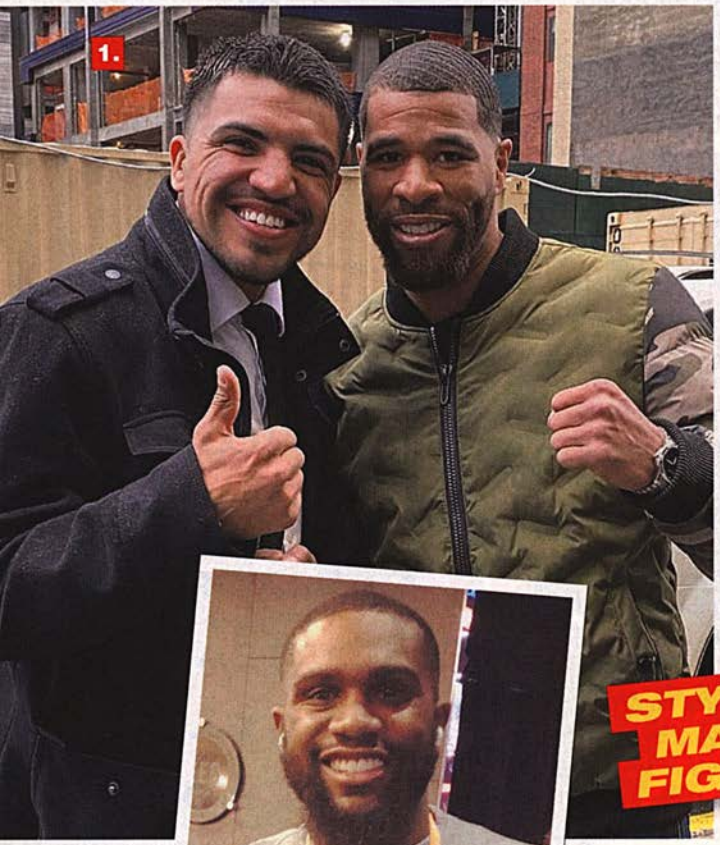

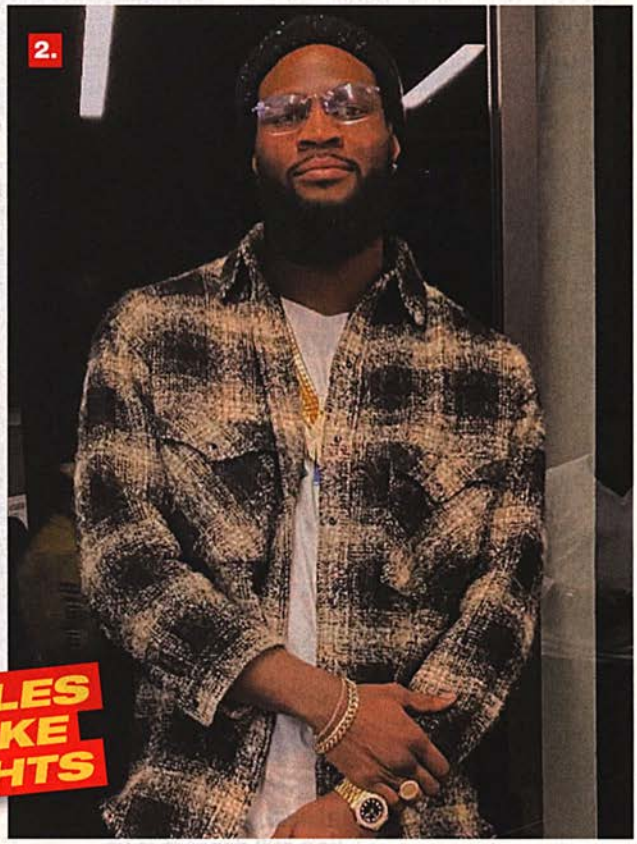

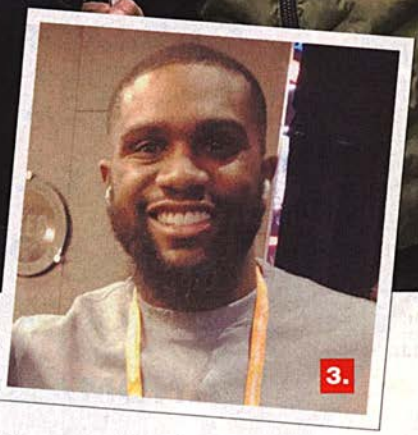

STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

Spotted at Danny Garcia vs. Ivan Redkach (Barclays Center in Brooklyn): 1. Former titleholder Victor Ortiz (left) and former contender Anthony Peterson 2. Light heavyweight contender Marcus Browne 3. Welterweight prospect Jaron Ennis.

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MONEY SHOT

In the third defense of his WBC junior lightweight title, Floyd Mayweather (right) faced off against Uganda-born puncher Justin Jukko on May 22, 1999, in Las Vegas. It was a routine win for Mayweather, who dominated from start to finish and closed with a spectacular ninth-round knockout. However, the future pay-per-view superstar was still building his profile at this stage of his career, and the Jukko bout took place on the undercard of Oscar De La Hoya's welterweight title defense against Oba Carr. Mayweather would of course go on to face De La Hoya himself, winning a split decision over the "Golden Boy" in 2007.

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